

**URBAN AFRICAN-AMERICAN SINGLE MOTHERS USING RESILIENCY  
AND RACIAL SOCIALIZATION TO INFLUENCE ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN  
THEIR YOUNG SONS**

A Dissertation

by

LISA DORIS HENDERSON-HUBBARD

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2011

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

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Influence Academic Success in Their Young Sons

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## **ABSTRACT**

Urban African-American Single Mothers Using Resiliency and Racial Socialization to  
Influence Academic Success in Their Young Sons.

(December 2011)

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This research study was conducted as a qualitative case study of five resilient single African-American mothers of successful young sons who attended an elementary school in a large urban school district. The study was designed to hear the voices of these mothers and their lived experiences using racial socialization to influence school readiness and academic achievement in their young sons. The intent of this case study was to broaden the limited qualitative research base on this population and inform administrators, educators, and other single parents about factors that may contribute to more positive academic outcomes for African-American males.

This qualitative study used the actual words of the participants to tell their stories, as it provided rich descriptions of their lives. Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and the mothers' responses shaped the phenomena under study. Analysis occurred immediately after each interview, and analytic conclusions were

formulated by coding and categorizing ideas or statements of experiences from the data to ensure that important constructs, themes, and patterns were noted.

The results of this study yielded the following as it related to the voices of these resilient single African-American mothers: (1) these single mothers believe that their ability to overcome adversity positively influences their son's academic success; (2) these mothers also believe their upbringing has influenced their parenting style; (3) family, church members, and friends play an important role in supporting these mothers and sons; (4) church attendance and faith in God help these mothers to persevere in difficult times; and (5) racial socialization is a tool these mothers used to help their sons to be successful in school.

## **DEDICATION**

Giving all honor and glory to God, I dedicate this dissertation to my hero, my mother, Doris F. Henderson. She began this journey with me, but went home to be with the Lord before it was complete. It has been hard to go on without her, but I am completing this journey to continue her legacy of being a strong, educated Black woman who never gives up. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my beautiful daughters, Kayla and Karissa and my precious granddaughter, Mikaela. I hope that my accomplishments will encourage and inspire you to persevere through difficult times and achieve all of your dreams.

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Thanks also go to my friends, colleagues, and the department, faculty, and staff for making my time at Texas A&M University a great experience. My gratitude is also extended to the single mothers who were willing to participate in the study.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Chapter I provides an overview of the study and introduces the rationale for investigating the factors that positively effect school readiness and academic success in young African-American males being raised by their single mothers. Chapter I also presents and introduces the theoretical framework, statement of the problem, research design and definitions of terms for the study.

A critical issue facing the United States of America is the plight of African-American males born to single mothers (Hymowitz, 2005). Research on resilience has consistently shown that single parenting and growing up as an African-American male are two potential risk factors that tend to have adverse impacts on children (Cicchetti & Garnezy, 1994). Several million children under the age of 18 live in female-headed low-income single parent homes and are more likely to live in poverty in America (U.S. Census, 2000).

Single parent homes headed by African-American mothers are usually assumed to be broken and unstable and are said to produce uncontrollable, uneducable African-American males (Hill, 1998). Few studies have focused on single African-American mothers who are raising successful young sons (Griffin & Allen, 2006). In order to determine factors that contribute to the successful academic achievement of this population of students, it is imperative to gain an understanding of the influences that support them in overcoming educational struggles and becoming socially and

---

This dissertation follows the style and format of the *Educational Researcher*.

academically successful (Griffin & Allen, 2006). It is also imperative to examine the factors that enable single African-American mothers to fare well in raising their young sons, despite their challenging circumstances (Murry, Bynum, Brody Wilert, & Stephens, 2001).

According to Jackson, Brooks-Gunn, Huang and Glassman (2000), a majority of African-American males are now being raised by single mothers. The 2000 U.S. Census shows 3,809,000 African-American children were being raised by African-American single mothers due to absent husbands, the mother being widowed, divorced or simply having never married (U.S. Census, 2000). In 2000, there were 3,814,000 African-American female headed households with children under the age of 18 (U.S. Census, 2002).

Previous research on single African-American mothers has been done based upon the dominant culture which has resulted in stereotypes and misconceptions (Dickerson, 1995). Single African-American mothers need to be presented in the context of their structure and function in order to provide more effective and sensitive policy approaches and useful roles for educators and scholars in the field (Dickerson, 1995). Educators and child development researchers must find ways to better prepare future teachers and social workers to assist African-American single mothers with raising their sons. Although many of these mothers find raising sons to be difficult, others focus on facilitating their sons' success within the school setting.

African-American males lag significantly behind their European male peers on standardized test scores and grade point averages (Noguera, 2003; Wright, 2007).

Previous research provides limited data on primary grade schooling experiences of African-American males, and it is usually limited to test scores (Noguera, 2003; Wright, 2007). Many African-American males do not attend quality preschool programs or participate in early learning opportunities, and early failure in school typically leads to classroom frustration, academic withdrawal, and negative behavior in African-American males. This population has a history marred by underachievement and low expectations, coupled with practices that systematically place African-American males at risk academically. African-American males are not reaping their fair share of academic success. The academic achievement gap between African-American males and their White counterparts continues to be a national concern (White, 2009). Ethnographic and qualitative studies of the primary years of schooling for African-American males are rare, and this study will help to fill the gap in the literature (Tyson, 2002).

This study focused on the manifestation of resilience in single African-American mothers who are raising their sons. The goal of this study was to delineate the factors that influence resilience, school readiness, and academic success in young African-American males who live in African-American, female headed, single parent, households. This goal was accomplished by eliciting stories of success and resilience from single African-American mothers. Their lived experiences were recorded, analyzed, and reported. Sharing the stories of these single African-American mothers raising successful young sons, hopefully, will help to break the cycle of academic failure for this group of students. In order to improve the educational outcome for African-

American males, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of how the relationship with their single mothers influences their school readiness and academic success.

### **Personal Story**

Working as an African-American female kindergarten teacher and elementary school counselor for the past 20 years, I have witnessed the many academic challenges of African-American males. In my experience, I have seen many teachers attempting to teach African-American male students without building relationships with them or their parents. Some teachers of African-American males fail to use engaging or culturally relevant lessons that hold attention, and then they blame parents and society for the failure of these students. Hopefully, the findings from this study will allow me to share information with researchers, colleagues, and other parents in order to improve the plight of the educational experience for African-American males.

As a single African-American mother raising daughters, I feel that I can relate to single African-American mothers raising sons. Additionally, I have experienced racial inequalities as it relates to raising young children. Society has painted a picture that single African-American mothers, in general, are not interested in the academic success of their children and are not committed to making educational success happen. Raising children as a single African-American mother and observing other single African-American mothers, has confirmed that contrary to the beliefs of some researchers, policy makers, and educators, these mothers are concerned, active, and supportive when it comes to the educational success of their children. It is my belief that single African-American mothers are serious about their children's educational potential and committed

to improving educational outcomes. Hopefully, this study will allow their voices to be heard. This study will seek to move beyond the surface of observation and inform how single African-American mothers feel that they influence the school readiness and academic success of their sons.

### **Background of the Study**

Over the past twenty years, the structure of the American family household has changed immensely resulting in many children living in single-parent homes. Only 40 percent of African-American males are being raised in two-parent homes and most will spend a large part of their childhood without a father (Demo & Cox, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2002; 2006). Research indicates that parental and familial support has positive effects on students' academic performance (Greif, 2000; Herndon & Moore, 2002; Moore, 2005; Moore, 2000; Moehling, 2007) and career decision process (Hrabowski, 2002). In addition to the role of families, Perry (2003) suggest that teachers must make the racial, ethnic, and social barriers that exist within schools unambiguous in order to help African-American males view their school potential in a positive manner.

One of the most debated topics in education today is the consistent low academic achievement of African-American males in the United States (Robinson, 2007). African-American males are overrepresented in special education programs and out of school suspensions, yet they are underrepresented in advanced placement courses and gifted programs (Jackson & Moore, 2006). A large portion of the research on African-American males tends to focus solely on their deficits academically, socially, and behaviorally instead of concentrating on their high level of academic achievement

(Luster & McAdoo, 1994). The deficit model exalts underachieving African-American males at the center of the research and detracts from their success (Toldson, 2008). Few studies disprove the countless theories that explain why African-American males are at risk for academic success. In order to determine factors that contribute to their academic and social success, it is important to gain an understanding of the influences that support them in overcoming educational struggles and becoming socially and academically successful (Griffin & Allen, 2006).

Currently in the U.S. only about half of African-American males who enter ninth grade continue school long enough to receive their high school diploma (Orfield, Losen, & Wald, 2004; Kunjufu, 2005). African-American males that fail to complete high school or attend college are likely to have fewer employment opportunities and will have significantly lower earnings as adults (Hale, 2001; Kunjufu, 2005). The unemployment rate for African-American males is twice that of White males. African-American males between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five have an unemployment rate of 50 percent, which has resulted in a drastic increase in the poverty level (Brown & Jones, 2004; Cross & Slater, 2000; Hale, 2001).

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is a need to gain a deeper understanding of school readiness and academic success in young African-American males, and one way is to look at single African-American mothers and what they do. There is also a need to focus on how these resilient mothers use racial socialization as a tool to influence their young sons' successful schooling experiences. This study will give voice to these mothers whose stories might



otherwise go untold. The point of understanding the issues facing single African-American women is that even amid movements for racial and equal justice the particular needs of this subgroup will often go unaddressed in favor of broader concerns and interests of the dominant movement (Ray, 2008).

Delgado (2001) makes a clear and compelling case for the complexities African-American single mothers face in society. By virtue of their status alone, single working mothers regardless of race, experience discrimination. Moreover, African-American single mothers may have to endure multiple and unique forms of oppression. Race, gender, and class are defined as social, political, and economic constructs that constitute dimensions of oppression and discrimination (Harley, Jolivette, McCormick, & Tice, 2002; Moehling, 2007). Today, low-income African-American single mothers still face the challenges of poverty and fewer job opportunities (Durr & Hill, 2002; Goldscheider & Bures, 2003; Hill, 2001). In light of the increase in single parent families, an awareness of cultural differences and the unique evolutionary struggles experienced by African-American women is fundamental and crucial to understanding how research might inform change in their well-being.

The experiences of African-American single mothers are characterized by a distinctive intersection of constructs with social, political, economic, and cultural implications. These constructs are defined by the status of an individual as well as institutional and societal forces containing the power to construct hierarchies, which in turn create inequalities (Harley, 2002; Hill, 2001). This takes into account historical and

pervasive effects of the marginalization of African-American single mothers and the impact of these social systems of power on their lives and their families.

Reports and other quality-of-life indicators suggest that African-American males are in trouble socially and academically (Noguera, 2003). When compared to their peers, African-American males lag significantly behind on standardized tests scores and grade point averages (Noguera, 2003). Research shows that poor academic performance by African-American males in elementary school decreases the likelihood that they will attend college, which has a strong correlation with their disproportionately large numbers in our country's jails and prison system (Males & Macallair, 2000). If African-American males are to have a positive outlook on education and life in general, it will greatly depend on their social and academic achievement (Hopkins, 1997).

### **Significance of the Study**

An in-depth case study of this sort may present valuable information for parents, teachers, administrators, and ultimately school systems. The educational community may benefit from the findings as they seek to improve the knowledge and skill of African-American males. This study also is intended to assist in reducing the academic achievement gap between African-American males and their counterparts. It is imperative that educators and researchers continue to try to find the most optimal conditions and strategies that will benefit the school readiness and academic achievement of African-American males. African-American single mothers are a significant factor in the lives of young African-American boys, and understanding the influence they have on the school readiness and academic success of their sons, can

possibly provide more effective and useful roles for educators (Dickerson, 1995). Hopefully, the outcome will be schools that will design, implement, and maintain the strategies that will be most advantageous for teaching African-American males (Hopkins, 1997).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore how resilient single African-American mothers use racial socialization to influence school readiness and academic achievement in their successful young sons in an urban school setting. Most studies on racial socialization have focused on parents of adolescents, and little is known about whether and how parents of early elementary school children engage in racial socialization. The few studies that have examined this process with young children have shown inconsistent findings. This study is important because there continues to be a need to better understand the life experiences of African-American female single parents and their young sons so that educators, school administrators, and policy makers are informed to assist African-American males in having the opportunity to succeed in life and become contributing members of society. Hopefully, sharing these practices with researchers, educators, and parents will help to improve the school readiness and academic achievement of more African-American males.

Elementary school age African-American males were chosen for this study because the early educational experiences of these students are the most important indicator of the developmental trajectory of achievement throughout school (Best, 1983; Entwisle, 1993; Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 1997; Whiting, 2006). To understand

the characteristics of successful African-American mothers raising successful sons, it is important to explore all possible dynamics that might help to change the way these mothers are perceived by the public, policy makers and educators.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions served as a guide for the study:

1. How do single African-American mothers describe their personal characteristics attributed to raising successful sons?
2. How do single African-American mothers exercise and interpret their acts of mothering to raise successful sons?
3. How do single African-American mothers use racial socialization to influence the school readiness of their sons?

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

With regard to the nature of the establishment of transferability in a case study, there are some obvious limitations to my study. Through this case study I am only examining these five women. I do not make claim that all single African-American single mothers raising young sons will have the same experiences as the women in my study. It is my hope, however, that parents, teachers, administrators, and researchers will discover for themselves ways in which the information in my study can be applied to other situations and perhaps be used to enhance the educational attainment and school readiness of more African-American males.

The following delimitations helped to restrict the focus of my research.

This study investigated the experiences of African-American single mothers in an urban school in a specific city in south Texas, not the state or nation as a whole. Also, participants represented a purposeful sample of single African-American mothers raising young sons. Therefore, other single mothers raising older sons or girls were not included.

### **Definition of Terms**

***African-American Male:*** A male person of African descent who was born and reared in the United States between the ages of five and six and currently in kindergarten (Brown & Davis, 2000).

***African-American Single Mother:*** A female person of African descent who is the head of her household and raising her son. There is no other adult living in the household. The father does not live in the home because of separation, divorce, or death (Brown & Davis, 2000). For the purpose of this study, the single mother will be the only adult living in the home.

***Family Support System:*** Birth parents, grandparents, blood relatives, non-blood friends, daycare providers, teachers, peers, mentors, church groups, community members and other institutions.

***Successful young African-American male:*** Elementary aged male scoring at grade level on district assessments, no discipline referrals on record, and receives grades of Es and Ss on report card in the area of grades and conduct.

***Academic success:*** Scoring at grade level on the districts' kindergarten beginning-of-year and mid-year benchmark assessment.

***Title I school:*** A school that receives federal funds allocated to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on academic achievement standards and state academic assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

***School readiness:*** Physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, and cognition and general knowledge are the five components for school readiness (McPherson, 2008).

***Resiliency:*** A dynamic process that includes positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity (Luther, 2000).

***Racial Socialization:*** The transmittal of values, attitudes, and behaviors that help to prepare future generations for possible negative race-related experiences (Hughes & Chen, 1997).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will summarize the literature and research pertinent to this study. The review of literature will provide support and clarity to the study by illuminating concepts that address historical, individual, and single-parent related factors that impact both individual and family resilience and racial socialization. The relevance of the historical portion of the literature review is to develop an understanding of the fact that since slavery, single African-American females were resilient and able to rise above adversity in spite of harrowing circumstances. The individual portion focuses on how African-American males and their single mothers overcome adversity despite always being viewed from a deficit lens.

To understand the way single African-American mothers raise successful young sons, it is important to understand their personal characteristics, their acts of mothering, and the influence racial socialization has on the school readiness and academic success of their young sons. In order to completely understand the plight of African-American single mothers raising young sons, it is important to look at their lives not only presently, but also historically. Research on single African-American mothers and successful young African-American males will serve as the core of this study.

Resiliency and racial socialization are race-relevant experiences that seem to ameliorate the negative impact of racial discrimination experiences on African-American males' academic outcomes (Neblett, Philip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006). Racial

socialization generally refers to the process of socializing children about the significance and meaning of race. This process takes place through explicit and non-explicit messages about race (Hughes & Chen, 1997). Most of the studies that have documented a relationship between racial discrimination and academic outcomes in African-American males have also found this relationship is moderated by African-American males' race-relevant experiences or beliefs (Wong, 2003).

For single African-American mothers, preparing their young sons to function in U.S. society necessitates a special consideration of the unique social position of African-Americans in this country, in addition to the socialization that all parents undertake (Caughy, Nickerson, O'Campo, & Randolph, 2002). This unique parenting process is generally referred to as racial socialization. Most theorists and researchers agree that racial socialization is the task and responsibility that African-American single mothers have of raising physically and emotionally healthy African-American males in a society in which being African-American has negative connotations.

## **Resilience**

The theoretical framework that guides this study is resilience from a strengths perspective and the process of racial socialization. Research has many theories and approaches for individual failure and success. A study by Bernard (1999) approached resilience from a perspective of strength instead of weakness, and suggests that resiliency research should first strive to determine how and why individual strengths emerge. Secondly, research must identify protective factors that permit individuals to strive in spite of adversity. The objective of resiliency research is to discover how certain



individuals are able to adapt and bounce back from risk factors and challenges in life (Shene, 1999; Brown & Davis, 2000). The focus of resiliency research should be to discover how resiliency occurs, and the objective should be to help resiliency occur (Shene, 1999; Brown & Davis, 2000). The characteristics of resiliency and racial socialization and how it occurs are central to this study. Also of interest are qualitatively identified perceptions that single African-American mothers present as causes for the success of their young sons.

Family resilience focuses on potentials that are inherent in the family setting that allow successful adaptations to occur in spite of adverse conditions. Numerous studies that were focused on children have consistently shown that there is a direct correlation between the family system and resilient outcomes. Baldwin, Baldwin, and Cole (1990) point to the importance of parental vigilance, and emphasize the value of maternal social support to children.

Resilience generally refers to manifested competence in the context of significant challenges to adaptation . Some researchers view resilience as interactional in nature and define it as a dynamic process that includes positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity (Luther, 2000; Davis, 2008). Viewed from this perspective, a strengths perspective further explains the ability to maintain adaptive functioning or to regain functioning in the presence of one or more risk factors without experiencing one or more serious harmful outcomes (Nash & Bowen, 1999; Davis, 2006). Although strengths and resilience have often been used interchangeably in the literature, Goldstein (1997) sees resilience as the attribute that epitomizes and operationalizes the conceptual

framework of the strengths perspective. The strengths perspective emphasizes the resources, assets, potentials, and capabilities of individuals, families, and communities.

Theoretically, a risk and resilience model is often used to characterize at risk families and to help explain successful families in difficult situations. As such, the risk and resilience model was useful when applied to a sample of at risk individuals in the study of single African-American mothers raising young sons. According to this model, families facing economic hardships are not equally in jeopardy, but have individual, familial, and contextual differences which result in divergent outcomes. Therefore, outcomes other than those highlighted by studies using a deficit focus are produced. This was critical to the reexamination of single African-American mothers raising young sons, given that our understanding of this phenomenon is based largely on clinical theories, which emphasize the Western values of separateness and independence.

Protective factors may exert direct effects on child outcomes by insulating children and parents, thus altering, but not necessarily eliminating, the relations between risks and outcomes. Based on Masten's (2001) work, a variable-focused approach was implemented in this study as it allows one to test for multiple linkages among measures of the degree of risk or adversity, outcome, and potential qualities of the individual or environment that may function as a protective factor for those facing risk. Masten (2001) states that this type of design is advantageous because it maximizes statistical power and is well suited to searching for specific and differential links between predictors and outcomes that have implications for intervention. The present study contributes to the literature because investigations that consider how assets, risks, and protective factors

influence each other over time are rare but vital to our understanding of family functioning in adverse conditions (Masten, 2001). The overall aim of the current study was to begin to fill this gap. As mentioned, single parents' resources and means of coping have been examined in the literature; however, single parenting has been conceptualized ecologically when trying to determine the causes of this phenomenon (Jurkovic, 1997); no studies have considered the possible impact of contextual factors on single parenting (Stacy, 2007). In the next section of the paper I will summarize the studies examining the unique cultural, family structure, and economic contexts in which African-American single-mother families reside that may explain variations in the experiences for this population.

### **Racial Socialization**

Empirical evidence suggests that racial socialization messages are a routine part of the parenting practices of most African-American parents (Hughes, 2006). Although, racial socialization researchers have discussed a myriad of ways in which parents of African-American males socialize their sons about race, several themes repeatedly emerge (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hughes, 2006). First, African-American parents convey messages that emphasize pride in African-American history and culture which is referred to as racial pride messages. A second theme focuses on highlighting the existence of inequalities between African-Americans and other racial groups which are known as racial barrier messages. Another theme emphasizes equality among races and these are called egalitarian messages. A fourth theme focuses less explicitly on race, but emphasizes feelings of individual worth within the broader

context of being African-American and these messages are referred to as self-worth messages. Finally, parents engage in race-related activities such as buying African-American literature and arts, known as racial socialization behaviors. These behaviors while lacking in explicit verbal context, also convey messages about being African-American.

Thornton and colleagues reported that two thirds of African-American parents reported incorporating racial socialization messages into their parenting practices (Thornton, Chatters, Taylor & Allen, 1990). Racial socialization messages were classified as either mainstream experience, minority experience, or African-American cultural experience. Racial socialization refers to the developmental processes by which children acquire the behaviors, perceptions, values, and attitudes of an ethnic group and come to see themselves and others.

The process of racial socialization is important to understand for several reasons. First, racial socialization links seemingly unrelated literatures such as family processes, socialization processes, life course development, and identity formation. Second, messages about race and racism can interact with the content of other socialization messages. For example, gender roles are often learned in context of race roles and political ideology is often shaped by racial ideology (Bennett, 2007). Third, it implicates the development and stability of racial attitudes across the life course. Fourth, it focuses on the African-American population that is often not the subject of scientific studies. Fifth, racial socialization is increasingly regarded as crucial for the development of

African-American children's racial identity, self-esteem, attitudes, values, and beliefs regarding race.

Racial socialization is a complex, multidimensional construct. Because of its complexity, there is no single or commonly accepted definition. Rather, multiple definitions, each describing either single or multiple functions, exist. Some researchers define racial socialization simply as the transmittal of values, attitudes, and behaviors that help to prepare future generations for possible negative race-related experiences, while others conceptualize it as a process of helping future generations develop a positive racial identity (Demo & Hughes, 1990; Barr & Neville, 2008). Other researchers have combined multiple functions in defining racial socialization. It has been conceptualized as the process of communicating behaviors and messages to African-American children for the purpose of enhancing their sense of racial/ethnic identity, partially in preparation for racially hostile encounters.

The mere fact that racial socialization is a complex process that incorporates messages pertaining to racial identity, culture, intergroup interactions, and discrimination, excluding one or two of these content areas from definitions limits researchers' ability to capture all functions of this process (Stevenson, 1994). It is difficult to compare findings from studies that use measures based on different operational definitions. Fatimilehin (1999) stated that most definitions of racial socialization include the issue of coping in an oppressive environment, and the lack of agreement in terms of boundaries of the definition is reflected in the diversity of ways in which it has been measured. Therefore, it is difficult to compare the few studies that

have been published. Lesane-Brown (2006) suggests that racial socialization be defined as specific verbal and non-verbal messages transmitted to younger generations for the development of values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs regarding the meaning and significance of race and racial stratification, intergroup and intragroup interactions, and personal and group identity. This definition integrates those proposed by existing scholars (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Marshall, 1995; Miller, 1999) and highlights how messages are transmitted verbally and non-verbally, what types of messages are transmitted, and the purpose of messages (Lesane-Brown, 2006).

According to Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, and Nickerson (2002), African-American parents routinely engage in racial socialization practices as part of their parenting repertoire. There is a growing body of evidence supporting the notion that the more parents engage in racial socialization practices, the more their children show improved socio-emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes. Given this evidence, Coard, Wallace, Stevenson, & Miller-Brotman (2004) conducted a study to provide insight into which specific racial socialization practices are prevalent among African-American parents. The following are four themes that emerged from their study on the content of race-related messages that parents give their young children: Racism Preparation, Racial Pride, Racial Equality and Racial Achievement.

Boykins and Toms (1985) study posits that racial socialization includes three themes: (a) Cultural experiences, (b) Mainstream experiences, and (c) Minority experiences. Thornton (1990) proposes that racial socialization includes messages related to: (1) identity, (2) inter-group and intra-group relationships, and (3) social

hierarchy. Stevenson (1994) states that racial socialization involves using teaching modes about racism in society, educational struggles, importance of extended family, spiritual and religious awareness, African-American culture and pride, and transmission of childrearing values. Hughes and Chen (1997) categorize racial socialization messages as focusing on (a) an emphasis of cultural heritage and pride, or cultural socialization; (b) preparation for future bias; (c) promoting racial mistrust; and (d) egalitarianism.

Racism preparation was related to parents' messages emphasizing racial barriers and protocol. Both defensive and racial protocol (i.e., social distance and distrust) and strategic racial protocol (i.e., adaptive racial orientation) were included in this theme. Parents discuss the importance of teaching their children adaptive strategies to deal with discrimination and how to navigate mainstream culture, as well as their own culture. Teaching their children certain rules of behavior and language so their children could fit in with mainstream culture was included in racism preparation (Brotman, Coard, Stevenson, & Wallace, 2004).

Racial pride was related to messages that parents gave their children as a way of buffering negative images and stereotypes depicted of African-American people. Included in this theme were teachings of African-American unity and group commitment, such as teaching a child that their behavior reflects positively or negatively on both the family unit and the African-American community. This also included the importance of supporting African-American businesses.

Racial equality consists of messages where egalitarian virtues, expanded opportunities, and peaceful and multiethnic co-existence are emphasized. The messages

focus on the similarities and equality of members of all races/ethnicities. This theme was also described as parents speaking to their children about perceiving individuals for who they are opposed to making judgments based on skin color.

Racial achievement was related to achievement-oriented teachings from parents about individual and academic achievement, such as the necessity to excel, achieve and work hard. Parents conveyed messages that their children would have to work twice as hard as their White counterparts to be as successful. Parents also stressed the importance of academic success and the belief that getting a good education would assist in overcoming racial obstacles and barriers. Messages that emphasized being honest, polite and staying out of trouble were also included in this theme.

All parents in this study describe using racial socialization practices with their young children. Results revealed a high prevalence of specific racial socialization messages utilized by these African-American parents of young children; 67% offer messages related to racial achievement, 73% apprise messages related to preparation for bias, 86% promote messages related to racial equality, and 93% inspire messages related to racial pride. These practices were used routinely and viewed as something that African-American parents must do. Reasons included the belief that their parenting role was different in many ways from European American parents and more challenging. Personal experiences with racism served as a basis for their urgency in raising African-American children with a sense of racial awareness (Brotman, Coard, Stevenson, & Wallace, 2004; Barr & Neville, 2008).



To raise physically and emotionally healthy African-American males, single mothers must buffer information about race (Murray, Bynum, Brody, Wilert, & Stephens, 2001; Stacey, 2007). Single African-American mothers must socialize their sons to understand (1) African-American culture and how to interact with other African-Americans, (2) how to get along with other racial groups, and (3) how to cope with their oppressed minority status (Boykin & Toms, 1985). The process of preparing African-American males to understand their unique heritage, culture and the meaning of membership in a low status racial group is also, commonly referred to as racial socialization (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Stevenson, 1994; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor & Allen, 1990; Brown, 2008). It also refers to the promotion of psychological and physical health through child-rearing in a society where dark skin may lead to discrimination and racism, which can lead to detrimental outcomes for African-American males (Chester & Jones, 2007).

Resilience was a common thread among all of the single mothers in this study. They all discussed the challenges of trying to raise their young sons alone. Many of the mothers lacked a college education and worked long hours to provide for their sons. Therefore, they were diligent in trying to provide the best possible educational opportunities for their young sons. One of the tools the mothers in the study discussed in terms of providing a positive schooling experience for their sons was racial socialization. They believed that it was important to inform their young sons of the possibility of unfair and unequal treatment in society, due to their ethnicity. They all discussed how they constantly showered their son's with positive messages about themselves, their

future, and their absent fathers to build self-esteem and self-confidence. These mothers also made sure to place other positive people in their sons' lives who would reiterate these messages. They also provided their sons with culture enriching activities such as Black History museums and festivals. Although most of the mothers used subtle racial socialization practices, they all agreed that it was a tool that could equip their sons to handle possible racial discrimination at school or in the community.

### **Historical Context of Single African-American Mothers**

Families and households managed solely by African-American mothers have been an integral part of American society since the days of the British colonization of North America and have been the nexus of race, gender, and class within the United States (Moehling, 2007). African-American single motherhood first evolved as the manifestation of the slave woman's legal and cultural social death. The history of single African-American mothers and their families is part of the history of American family life.

Research about African-American single mothers has been done based upon the models of the dominant culture which has resulted in stereotypes and misconceptions (Dickerson, 1995; Moehling, 2007). African-American single mothers encounter the same dissemination of power and economic resources as do White single mothers (Brewer, 1993; Stacey, 2007). African-American single mothers need to be presented in the context of their actual structure and function in order to provide more effective and sensitive policy approaches and useful roles for educators and scholars in this field (Dickerson, 1995; Moehling, 2007).

As we contemplate the issue of race and racism, the law enacted in 1663 along with Elkins' (1976) and Giddings' (1984) interpretation of its consequences for African-American servants, we can begin to comprehend a deeply rooted and pervasive nature of prejudice toward African-American single mothers with its origins in White racism.

African-American mothers possess a unique history bounded by oppressive factors emerging in slavery and existent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These mothers can be best understood through a depiction of the historical circumstances that thrust them into a unique position pertaining to race in the United States. Allen and James (1998) suggest there are four major transitions that African-American mothers have undergone historically that contribute to experiential differences from a racial standpoint: 1) The slave trade, 2) emancipation, 3) southern migration, and 4) desegregation laws. These events bring with them significant and profound realities that have influenced the lives of African-American mothers.

The origin of racism and difference discrimination of African-American mothers in the United States began with slave trade. Slavery was the wellspring from which African-American mother's inferior treatment originated (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). The capitalistic culture of the slave trade required that the life of a slave be carefully defined. According to the Maryland Law of 1663, "All Negroes or other slaves within the province and all Negroes and other slaves to be hereafter imported into province, shall serve *durante vita*; and all children born of any Negro or other slave, shall be slaves as their fathers were for the term of their lives." This was the root and nature of prejudice with its origins in White racism (Elkins, 1976).

This law was enacted following a period of colonialism that saw White servants as potential land owners whose time in servitude would be limited to allow them the advantages of other White colonists. As the number of African-Americans grew in the colonies and efforts to improve the status of White servants became more prevalent, the gap between the conditions of White and Black servants became significant with regard to the issue of color and paved way for a continuous slave state for African-Americans (Elkins, 1976; Giddings, 1984; Martinot, 2000). Indentured servitude would no longer apply to African-Americans in the colonies. This was, according to both Elkins (1976) and Giddings (1984), the first legal step rendering Black skin as ultimately equated with the term slave, thereby inextricably binding slavery and race.

By 1668, the law was modified to state that children of African-American women fathered by White men would derive their conditions from their mothers (no longer their fathers, as stated by the 1663 law) so as to insure the mulatto children fathered by slave owners would not be attached to their fathers legally. In a move to prevent masters from losing slaves by having slave children follow their fathers, it became legal that a father of a slave be unknown (Elkins, 1976; Giddings, 1978). This law has significant relevance in the discourse on the debate of the nature and origin of the single-parent characteristic of African-American women.

Given these assertions, the historical manifestations of slavery are worthy of review into the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to continue examining the efforts of African-American single mothers at managing the challenges of what Bell (1995) terms their “permanent subordinate status.” Some contend there is a viable legacy of slavery in the

21<sup>st</sup> century (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Logan, 1996). Elkins (1976) believes there are those who would question the relevance of the significant impact slavery would have on African-American single mothers today. Both viewpoints will serve as a useful purpose in the examination of the lives of the five mothers in this study and their lifestyles today. The aim of this discourse is the relationship between slavery and the ensuing oppressive construct of race. The existential impact that slavery has on African-American single mothers is a long-standing oppressive entity with little way out except to identify, unmask, and expose racism in all its various forms.

Shaped by the culmination of a post Renaissance period and ensuing Commercial Revolution taking shape in the colonies, the early status of indentured African-American servants would be clearly described. African-American women in particular would fall victim to a race/sex dialectic that served to stereotype them as sexually provocative (Giddings, 1984). A sexual division of labor was established for slave women and men in general. Women's roles were found in caring for White children, washing and midwifery. Female distinctions and fragility were given no consideration when the issue involved profit for slave owners (Ammott, 1991).

The role of women in the United States would take on particular characteristics evolving from the colonial period. Gender would become that entity associated with inequality and inferiority to the masculine gender through the ages (Collins, 1998; hooks, 1981; Knudsen-Martin, 1997; Zinn, 2000). In the United States a historical construct exists that pertains to the subordinate position of women in general. hooks (1981) states that European colonizers are responsible for the burgeoning patriarchal

system in America. It was patriarchy at the time of the formation of the colonies that laid the foundation for an American social and political order wherein racial imperialism as well as sexism were integral parts (hooks, 1981). The sexism ideology of the homelands of English settlers would define the subordinate position of women overall and have a grave impact upon the lives of African-American single mothers (hooks, 1981; Giddings, 1984). Boyd-Franklin (1989) posits that African-American men and women were sexually abused as slaves. The role for men would be as breeders to replenish the labor supply, while women were abused at the sexual pleasures of their White masters

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, gender is fundamentally important in light of the multiplicity of ways in which women have been historically affected. The literature abounds with information on gender as an oppressive construct from the work force to the social systems encountered by women in general and African-American single mothers in particular (Ammott, 1991; Bogard et al, 1999; Haddock, Zimmerman & MacPhee, 2000; hooks, 1981; Knudsen-Martin, 1997). Durr and Hill (2002) acknowledge the significant advances in the educational, political, and economic arenas made by African-American women over the past 40 years. The authors underscore, however, that enduring patterns of racial, gender, and class inequalities for women of African descent possess a salient quality that has not been diminished.

Social science literature of the 90's is deficient in comparable theories that address the concept of intersectionality and class in ways that promote greater understanding of the social context of class. This is particularly meaningful when converged with other structural forces that influence the experiences of African-

American single mothers. Kliman (1998) states race and class together offer greater clarity on the dilemmas as well as the possibilities under-privileged African-American single mothers face. Like race and gender, social class represents a system of power and oppression with significant social consequences for African-American single mothers (Bogard, McConnell, Gerstel, & Schwartz, 1999; Delgado, 2001; Kliman, 1998). In an attempt to understand the early origin of concepts around class structure and definition among slaves, Ruef and Fletcher (2003) assert that an early account of status hierarchy during slavery incorrectly assumed that there was relative similarity in occupational status among slaves. This account holds that there were merely two classes of slaves, a large class of unskilled field laborers and a smaller class of household servants.

Dubois (1996), in his classic seminal work, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, has conducted the first ethnographic study of the life of African-Americans who settled in Philadelphia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Anderson, 1996). He examines class and economics and provides an analysis thereof. Dubois' (1996) work is described as the first of its kind to meaningfully address and illuminate in profound ways the lived experiences of African-Americans in a post slavery era (Anderson, 1996).

Dubois' (1996) account of class provides an interesting and meaningful backdrop for understanding some early origins of the construct of class in the post Emancipation era. His account anticipates those by later researchers and theorists who have posited that the position of African-Americans in the United States is reflective of the institution of slavery, racism, and overarching issues of discriminatory economics and poverty (Dubois, 1996; Giddings, 1984; Collins, 1998).

Many authors point to varied ways of understanding class as it pertains to African-American single mothers (Collins, 1998; Kliman, 1998; Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Moore, 2005). The literature has demonstrated the profound impact of class in one's life (Nesbitt, 2006) and how class shapes who an individual is through personal and political relations. Dubois' (1996) study reveals the impact of class and economics for African-American women more than one hundred years ago.

Logan (1996) and Wilson (2002) recount the work of Daniel P. Moynihan (1965) and E. Franklin Frazier (1939) who argued conversely that African familial structures were destroyed as a result of the vicissitudes of slavery. They posit that what emerged were a multiplicity of family styles that exist today. Frazier (1957), in his work, asserts that whatever memories and customs slaves may have retained of their native land and customs were rendered meaningless in the New World. The African cultural heritage was impossible to maintain given the young ages of the slaves, precluding the development of a social organization that could keep rituals, practices, and beliefs alive.

There is evidence emanating from scholars of African-American family patterns and values which pre-date slavery and survived the "slavery holocaust" and is predicated on pre-colonial African culture (Logan, 1996; Ruggles, 1994; Boyd-Franklin 1989). Logan asserts that studies on ancient African civilization depict a culture that was highly evolved spiritually with significant focus on home and family life.

Elkins (1976) depicts West African tribesmen as profoundly family oriented and possessing a keen sense of family authority. Accordingly, the family structure was close and the elders of the family were held in great esteem. Billingsley (1968) asserts that



slaves emanated from a highly civilized background of strong family and community life equally as viable as that of their European captors. They describe vast libraries and educational institutions of which educated Europeans had knowledge (Delgado, 2001).

The Black church, school and family were the strongest institutions to emerge from slavery (Billingsley, 1998). The value African-Americans held for the institution of family, did not change. Ruggles (1994), in his study of the origin of African-American family structure, asserts that he has been able to track long-term trends among Blacks and Whites in the areas of single parenthood and extended family structure from 1880 to 1980. Ignoring these factors facilitates a view of pathology and disorganization in attempting to understand the experience of African-American single mothers (Ruggles, 1994).

The findings of this study revealed that changes in the percentages of children living in households without both parents first appeared over a century ago. Thus the high occurrence of single parenthood in African-American families is not a new phenomenon. Differences in family structure by race have expanded throughout the twentieth century, particularly over the past three decades. More specifically, there was stability in the percentage of African-American children residing in households with one parent from 1880 through 1990. This represented approximately two and half times the number of White children living in similar households. According to Hill (2001), the socially constructed ideal nuclear family was never a tradition of African-American families. As of the publication of Ruggles (1994), the percentages of children living in single parent households in both White and Black families has risen substantially.

Ruggles (1994) posits that economic changes have an impact on the increasing differential between the family structures of the two groups but does not offer explanation as to why this characteristic was displayed in African-American households at a much higher rate a century ago. The impact of socioeconomic conditions on newly freed African-Americans after Civil War and free Blacks in 1850, several years before the end of war, may have contributed to children living without both parents. Norms for African-Americans could have been an outgrowth of the slave experience or a manifestation of differences between African and European cultures (Ruggles, 1994). More research is needed to explore this notion fully, and Ruggle's (1994) examination of extensive data might be rendered more valid with the addition of a qualitative component designed to give life to the data.

Conversely, Billingsley (1998) contends that 80 percent of all African-American households were headed by married couples 15 years after the end of slavery. There had been no significant change to this as late as 1960 when the percentage dropped only two points to 78 percent. A downward spiral began to be revealed by 1970 through the late 1980's when intact households were at 48 percent (Billingsley, 1998). According to Ricciuti (2004), the number of children under the age of 18 living in African-American single female headed households was at 62 percent in a 1998 census report. Billingsley (1998) attributes this phenomenon to various social forces such as the unavailability of jobs due to technological changes, changing social customs, and governmental social policies that are punitive, ineffective, and oppressive.

Dubois' (1996) account of families in Philadelphia at the turn of the twentieth century, some 40 years after legal emancipation, explained that immigrants continued to flow into the city and were less likely to have a home life. He describes an African-American community where 10 to 25 percent of families were not legally married. This coincides with Billingsley's account of the number of married families after slavery.

Moving from African-American family origin to a more current viewpoint, much attention from a national perspective has been placed on the issue of African-American single mothers (Jarrett, 1994; Becker & Liddle, 2001; McAdoo, 2003). As divorce rates and pregnancy without marriage increase across a broad segment of society, unwed mothers have become a heightened phenomenon in America (McAdoo, 2003). According to McAdoo (2003), a mother alone with her children is becoming a more typical family structure.

The lives of many African-American children and families across this country are indeed complex. Some of them are living in poverty and filling prison cells instead of classrooms (Mandara & Johnston, 2008). There was a time when African-Americans were willing to die for opportunities for education and success. People who were not there in the early twentieth century cannot understand the desire African-Americans showed for education as a way to lift themselves from slavery.

Few can argue that African-Americans face challenges that are socially, politically, and culturally unique from any other race in the history of America (Rappaport, 1995). As noted by ecology anthropologist Rappaport (1995), past injustices such as slavery are probably impacting the development of African-Americans. African-

Americans were captured, enslaved, and held in bondage which may be discouraging many from pursuing success and liberty in America, but the lingering effects of racism may also promote resilience ( Mandara & Johnston, 2008).

America is still a divided country because the current state of racial integration and racial justice in society is discouraging, with many schools in the U.S. still largely segregated by race (Zirkel, & Cantor, 2004). America is divided into two nations, one for Whites and the other for Blacks, and they continue to be separate, hostile, and above all unequal. Historical considerations are paramount in drawing relative conclusions from studies involving behavioral outcomes as documented in several research studies (Cohler, Scott, and Musick, 1995; Arrington & Wilson, 2000).

### **Single African-American Mothers Raising Sons**

A majority of African-American males are now being raised by single mothers who according to Jackson, Brooks-Gunn, Huang and Glassman (2000), are more likely to experience hectic lifestyles that may cause inadequate or impaired parenting which may negatively affect the educational outcome of their sons. According to Underwood (2000), social scientists have painted a negative picture of African-American single mothers and the academic outcomes of their sons. The perceived behaviors of African-American mothers have often been referred to by social scientists as the negative other side of the “absent male” coin (Underwood, 2000). There is a notion that African-American mothers produce uncontrollable, uneducable sons who merge into the negative stereotypes of African-American females who create or sustain the broken family (Robinson, 2007). In 1990, 39% of African-American families were headed by two parents and according to

recent Census Bureau a figure, by the mid-1990s, the percentage was even lower (Robinson, 2007). In 2000, only 29% of African-American families were headed by two parent households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Contrary to much of the literature, African-American mothers value their children's education, and are supportive in their endeavors to perform well in school (Stevenson, Chen & Uttal, 1990; Lee & Kushner, 2008). African-American single mothers place considerable value on self-reliance, independence and educational achievement (Brody & Flor, 1998; Gantt & Greif, 2009). According to Stevenson, Chen, and Uttal (1990), most African-American mothers value their sons' education and promote positive school outcomes (Brown & Davis, 2000). Some African-American mothers feel that schools do not reflect their concerns regarding education. Although African-American mothers have much to offer educators, they have few opportunities to get involved at school due to their lack of knowledge of how the educational system works (Hunter, 2006).

A growing body of research has begun to focus on low-income African-American single mothers to examine the effects of mother-child relationships on child adjustment (Shook, 2008). Previous research on mother-child relationships has generalized the effects of European, middle-class, two-parent families, to ethnically and culturally diverse families (Shook, 2008). The mother-child relationship is instrumental in promoting child autonomy and self-worth (Baumrind, 1991). Emotional bonds and response to children's psychosocial needs have been associated with positive

developmental outcomes, self-esteem, social competence, avoidance of peer-pressure, and academic achievement (Cummings, Davies, & Campbell, 2000).

African-American single mothers highly value their son's independence, and they incorporate monitoring as a means of socializing them in the areas of self-reliance, educational achievement, and social well-being (Brody, 1998). McGroder's study on preschoolers from African-American, single-parent families provided evidence that high levels of nurturing and cognitive stimulation from mothers was associated with children's learning readiness and personal maturity (McGroder, 2000; Lee & Kushner, 2008). Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies on African-American single mothers found that lower levels of depression were associated with positive mother-child relationships (Klein & Forehand, 2000; Chester & Jones, 2007). The findings also suggest that mothers who avidly monitor their children protect them from sociodemographic risk factors and internalizing problems (Klein & Forehand, 2000; Chester & Jones, 2007).

The interaction between families, peers, and neighborhood contexts affect the outcomes of children living in African-American single mother homes. African-American single mothers' perception of their neighborhood, dictates the manner in which they parent their sons (Taylor, 2000; Zalot, Jones, Forehand, & Brody, 2007). When African-American single mothers employ frequent church attendance, mother-child communication, positive role modeling, negative attitudes toward deviance, and maintain a healthy relationship, their sons will be less likely to engage in substance abuse (Sullivan & Farrell, 1999). The quality of the mother-child relationship and the

existence of a father figure are predictive factors in the level of problems African-American males face among their peers (Mason, Cauce, Gonzales, & Hiraga, 1994; Roy & Burton, 2007).

As the plight of African-American males is discussed, there have been few attempts to connect their lives to sources of influence and support from their mothers (Davis, 2000; Gantt & Greif, 2009). Single parent homes headed by African-American mothers are usually assumed to be broken and unstable and are said to produce uncontrollable, uneducable African-American males (Hill, 1998). Poor single mothers have been the brunt of a disproportionate level of criticism for the unhealthy development of their African-American sons (Cottingham, 1989; Sullivan, 2008).

African-American single mothers have a profound influence on the family and social and educational development of African-American males (Davis, 2006). It is axiomatic that the way people are raised greatly influences the way they raise their children (Greif, Hrabowski, & Maton, 2000). Parents who raise highly successful children have probably had positive childhood experiences that would influence their child-rearing style.

Hines & Boyd-Franklin (1996) state that mothers are a dominant influence in the lives of African-American males because mothers are usually in the home as they are growing up and tends to be the strength of the family. African-American single mothers historically have played a key role in the family as far back as slavery when families were often divided. Because of the mother's key role in the single parent family and the

tenuous position of young African-American males, the nature of the mother-son relationship is of great importance (Zill & Nord, 1994; Gantt & Greif, 2009).

Brody and Flor (1998) found that maternal education, maternal religiosity, and psychological competence were characteristics of the family process model of African-American children living in single-mother-headed households in rural areas. These single mothers believed in a “no nonsense” parenting practice, higher mother-child relationship quality, and more involvement in their child’s schooling. The findings suggest that African-American single mothers’ religious beliefs promote supportive and responsive family relationships that help them cope with economic and social stress, yet raise successful African-American males (Brody & Flor, 1998; Johnson, 2008). I submit that looking in-depth at the relationship African-American males share with their mothers is the key to understanding the success or failure of their educational outcomes (Brown & Davis, 2000).

Research has shown that single African-American mothers who are directly involved in their son’s academics are associated with greater success (Flor, 1998; Gantt & Greif, 2009) and that African-American single mothers’ responsive behavior toward her son’s education ensures a direct correlation between the mother’s expectations and her son’s academic performance (Jackson & Remillard, 2005; Seginer, 1986). Moles (1987) stated that single mothers have the same interest as married parents to help their sons in the educational process.

Gurian (1996) states that it takes a community of families to raise a healthy African-American boy and offers four basic areas that they may need the most support in



order to achieve. These areas are contribution to society, commitment to mates, becoming responsible parents, and ongoing spiritual growth (Gurian, 1996). When African-American single mothers receive support from extended family members, non-blood friends, community members, church members, and teachers, their sons are more likely to obtain social and academic success (Sullivan, 2008). The family is the primary agent of socialization to provide children with core information about themselves and their environment (Franklin, 1984; Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones, 2007). African-American males who have constant social interaction with their fathers or other positive adult males have greater feelings of self-worth and better social and academic achievement in school (Coley, 1998; Roy & Burton, 2007).

### **The Role of Religion in the Lives of Single Mothers**

Churches and other organizations sometimes provide parental support, surrogate fathers, assistance with daily needs for child care, health care, and transportation (Billingsley, 1993; Johnson, 2008). Places of worship also serve as major socializing agents through nonreligious activities such as scouts and girls' or boys' clubs (Billingsley, 1993; Zekeri, 2007). Churches fulfill the educational role through Sunday school, schools run by churches or mosques, and vacation Bible school (Dickerson, 1995; Johnson, 2008).

Maton (2000) found that high levels of institutionally based religious support were associated with greater well-being. Church settings and the people associated with them, provide support for single mothers in several ways. Not only do they provide community concerts and recitals, they also provided food and clothing, and provide

positive relationships for single mothers (Brodsky, 2000). The internal relationship these mothers have with God and religious tenets provide them with a range of resources. Religious beliefs imbue single mothers with values that they try to live and teach their sons. These beliefs also influence the parenting style these mothers choose in helping their children to be successful in school and handle encounters with racism.

### **Support Systems**

An emerging body of research states that African-American single mothers employ co-parenting which is defined as the process by which these mothers and another adult share childrearing responsibilities (Belsky, Putnam, & Crinic, 1996; Coiro & Emery, 1998; Shook, Jones, Forehand, Dorsey, & Brody, 2010). Co-parenting may occur between the child's biological father, extended family members, or fictive kin such as close friends and neighbors (Coley, 2001; Gee & Rhodes, 2003; Jarrett & Burton, 1999; Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Davis, Rhodes, & Hamilton-Leaks, 1997; Shook, Jones, Forehand, Dorsey, & Brody, 2010). African-American grandparents are more likely to be active in helping to rear their grandchildren than their White counterparts (Dickerson, 1995). Aunts, uncles, and cousins of African-American males from single parent homes may help in the upbringing of these boys by participating in family rituals such as sharing meals together, prayers, church attendance, or other planned outings. Once a father acknowledges his child, his family becomes an integral part of the child's life and an important resource for the single mother (Boyd-Franklin, 1989). The extent to which the in-law family supports the single mother is dependent upon the relationship between the mother and father (Dickerson, 1995).

Community members are another support system for African-American single mothers. These members may be other parents in the neighborhood, the single mother's close friend, or the single mother's boyfriend (Dickerson, 1995; Roy & Burton, 2007). A tradition in African-American communities is that of a neighbor keeping an eye on a child while the mother is at work or away from home. Neighborhood mothers typically shared in the role of child rearing and even in the disciplining of the child (Dickerson, 1995; Zalot, Jones, Forehand, & Brody, 2007).

### **African-American Males in Education Today**

The nation's African-American males are in a state of crisis. There has been little work focusing specifically on the attainment of African-American males in our schools and there is little evidence available on the antecedents of underachievement for young African-American males (Ferguson, 2000; Polite & Davis, 1999; Ford, Moore, & Whiting, 2006; Jackson & Moore, 2006).

The current plight of young African-American males in schools demands much more focus, both theoretically and methodologically. Race and gender issues are central to any discussions about African-American males and achievement (Delpit, 1988; Fine, 1991; Fordham, 1996; Mickelson, 1991; Williams, 1996; Jackson & Moore, 2006). African-American males are too often disadvantaged by the perplexing and misunderstood intersection of race and gender. This is due to the sparse data available on the experiences and outcomes of African-American males in the early grades. However, the negative consequences of their poor achievement are more widely known and accepted. For this group of students, lower levels of achievement appears to have the

most significant consequences for future development of social identity, cognitive ability, emotional capacity, and social competence—each negatively influenced by poor schooling experiences (Heath & MacKinnon, 1988; Jackson, & Moore, 2006).

In 2001, approximately 15 percent of African-American males graduated from high school in four years and only one-third graduated in five years, compared with 33percent of White males who graduated in four years and half who graduated in five years (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2010). In 2008, African-American males ages 18 and over accounted for five percent of the total college student population and 36 percent of the total prison population.

Academic success or the lack of success among African-American males has been, and continues to be, a challenging subject of many studies and conversation. In their fight to obtain quality education, African-American males in particular are faced with many academic and social challenges ( Hrabowski et al., 1998; Polite & Davis, 1999; Ferguson, 2000; Jackson & Moore, 2006). African-American males in our schools are often condemned to failure because of the negative biases and prejudice that teachers, administrators, and institutions hold even before meeting, knowing, or objectively evaluating them.

In a nation with the greatest resources in the world, African-American males have been failed by the educational system for the past two decades (Lewis & Erskine, 2008). When compared to other students by gender and race, African-American males consistently have the lowest academic achievement, highest suspension and expulsion rates, and highest retention and dropout rates. However, the traditional education

research focuses on the educational shortcomings of African-American males rather than their success. These narrow and deficit model theories disguise the diversity and complexity of how African-American males operate within educational settings (Brown, Davis, 2000; Whiting, 2006). Throughout elementary and middle school, African-American boys consistently receive lower ratings in social behavior and academic expectations by teachers (Rong, 1996). African-American males are not being identified as academically high-achieving and are constantly faced with peer pressure to not achieve, therefore, they are scarcely represented in honors or advanced courses (Cross & Slater, 2000).

Some scholars propose that the persistence of negative data about the educational progress of the African-American male suggests that he is at extreme risk in school systems in America. They also contend that frequently public schools ignore the aspirations of African-American males. Their ability to learn is disregarded and schools fail to assess and cultivate their many talents, thereby, causing them to become frustrated, lose hope, and ultimately drop out or be pushed out of school (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Mutua, 2006).

Some of the literature indicates that African-American males are at a greater risk. Researchers note through the 1970s and the early 1980s that both African-American males and females made significant progress in gaining access to higher education in the nation's colleges and universities (Cross & Slater, 2000). The upward trend for the African-American female continues while the trend for the African-American male has not only reverted, but it has begun to spiral downward at an ever-accelerating pace

(Polite & Davis, 1999; Mutua, 2006). Separate paths taken by African-American males and females begin to manifest dramatically in both academic achievement and behavioral patterns in the fifth and sixth grade (Cross & Slater, 2000; Kunjufu, 2005).

Statistical data projections show that by 2020, 85 percent of jobs will require some education beyond high school. Such data and reports combined with other discussion have led researchers to believe that the troubles facing African-American males are more severe and deserve special attention (Leake & Leake, 1992; Polite & Davis, 1999).

In spite of the disturbing data relating to the failure in the education of African-American males, there is an academically successful segment of the African-American male population. For many of these males, this success is frequently achieved despite environmental barriers caused by economic hardship or social stress ( Polite & Davis, 1999; Taylor, 2000).

The aforementioned evidence of problems that African-American males face constantly make it apparent that there is a need to undertake a research study that would address the countless incidences of disapproval and low expectations held by society of the academic talents, prospective abilities, and innate skills of the African-American males. Consequently, many African-American males are placed in special education classes or remedial disciplinary schools without being given the benefit of the doubt or due process, and often after the smallest infraction. Taylor (2000) posits much of the literature focuses on the failure of the African-American male in many school settings for many reasons. Thus, the dubbing of endangered species to refer to African-American

males as popularized by Gibbs (1988) has become a recurrent theme among scholars when discussing their academic and social shortcomings.

Many public schools today often fail to provide adequate education for African-American children, particularly African-American males (Kunjufu, 2005). Kunjufu (2005) posits that public school systems are the most blatant institution in contributing to the destruction of African-American males. It is critical that a sincere and cognizant effort, especially on the part of the overall African-American population, be directed towards creating positive images of the nation's most imperceptible, underrated and underprivileged populations African-American males (Jones-Wilson, 1990; Akbar, 1991; Polite & Davis, 1999).

When compared to their peers, African-American males lag significantly behind on standardized tests, grade point averages, high school graduation rates, post-secondary attendance, and college graduation rates (Noguera, 2003; Kunjufu, 2005). Research shows that poor academic performance by African-American males in elementary and secondary school decreases the likelihood that they will attend college, which has a strong correlation with their disproportionately large numbers in our country's jails and prison system (Males & Macallair, 2000; Yeakey, 2002). African-American males are also disproportionately placed in special education, suspended, or expelled from school, compared to their peers (Holzman, 2006).

Across the nation the dropout rates for African-American males in metropolitan areas are well over 50 percent, only four percent attend college, and three percent obtain a Bachelor's degree. African-American males have higher unemployment rates and lower

labor force participation than their counterparts. A mere quarter of the 1.9 million African-American males between the age of 18 and 24 attended college nationwide. Today, African-American men make up 41 percent of the inmates in federal, state, and local prison, but only make up four percent of all students in American institutions of higher education. It is estimated that on any given day, three out of every 100 Black men are in prison (Blake & Darling, 1994). The number of African-American males aged 25 to 29 who were in state or federal prison or local jails in 2005, was 12 percent compared to White males at 1.7 percent (Blake & Darling, 1994).

A number of scholarly works over the last two and a half decades have focused on the academic achievement of African-American males in Pre-K-12 (Brown & Davis, 2000; Davis, 2003; Franklin, 1991; Gibbs, 1988; Hopkins, 1997; Madhubuti, 1990; Noguera, 1996; Polite & Davis, 1999; Price, 2000; Landsman & Lewis, 2006). African-American males aged 26-30 had fewer years of education than White males in 2000. In 2005, 86.6 percent of all 25-29 year old African-American males held a high school diploma opposed to 88.4 percent in 1995. Only 49 percent of African-American males had completed some college compared to 64.3 percent of White males in 2005 (U. S. Department of Education, 2006).

African-American males are excessively overrepresented in the area of academic failure (Dallmann-Jones, 2002, Martin, Martin, Gibson, & Wilkins, 2007). They are also excessively underrepresented in advanced and honors courses and more likely to be placed in special education programs and suspended or completely expelled from school (Strayhorn, 2008). African-American males are one of the few groups who are most



likely to read below grade level when compared to White males (Larke, Webb-Johnson, & Carter, 1996).

Teachers' perceptions of African-American males in the classroom have a direct impact on their achievement (Robinson, 2007). African-American males can benefit from a classroom where the teacher is respectful and mindful of their culture (Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson & Bridgest, 2003). Inadequate teacher preparation and continued prejudice in classrooms that are educationally unequal, trap African-American males in a downward cycle and limit their ability to be a positive participant in the classroom (Hopkins, 1997). Most African-American males feel mistreated and wrongly judged by their teachers (Davis, 2003; Duncan, 2002). African-American males will continue to be at risk for social and school failure if teachers continue to misunderstand and negatively react to these students' cultural behavior (Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson & Bridgest, 2003). When teachers have high expectations and believe in African-American males, they will rise to the level of expectation.

Various researchers state that African-American males strongly desire to achieve academically and discuss an array of factors that motivate African-American males to become successful academically (Carter, 2005; Conchas, 2006; Hale, 2001; Majors & Billson, 1992). These researchers also posit that African-American males possess an intrinsic motivation that encourages high self-esteem, more self-worth, and confidence in their academic ability. When family and teachers encourage African-American males, they can excel despite societal influences and school forces that are typically obstructions (Carter, 2005; Conchas, 2006; Hale, 2001; Hrabowski, Maton, & Grief, 1998; Perry,

2003). Polite and Davis (1999) state that although African-American males are at risk for numerous social, economic, and educational challenges, many of these boys have survived and progressed into successful men.

### **Early Educational Experiences of African-American Males**

Another research area that has been neglected deals with the issues of African-American males' early childhood schooling and home experiences such as school readiness. This area of investigation would provide potentially useful information on African-American males' trajectory of achievement and differences in school engagement over time (Davis, 2003). The early educational experiences of African-American males are the most important factor in the developmental trajectory of achievement throughout school (Best, 1983; Entwisle et al., 1997; Jackson & Moore, 2006). Data on the early schooling of African-American males is sparse and usually limited to test scores. Children of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Prospects, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress are large national data sets that focus on early educational experiences of African-American males. These data sets could potentially be useful, but have been underutilized (Davis, 2003).

To ensure academic success for African-American males, curriculum improvement, instruction, and support for teachers should begin in preschool and early elementary before these boys begin to underachieve (Davis, 2003; Whiting, 2006). When elementary aged African-American males have unequal access to curriculum, achievement inequalities in the later grades are not surprising (Davis, 2003; Whiting, 2006). Little is known about the processes and experiences of early schooling of

African-American males (Boyd-Franklin & Franklin, 2000). The focus on the educational problems of African-American males is usually presented from an archetype of masculine behavior that is either deficient or distorted under the weight of racism, economic marginality, and cultural pathology (Hunter & Davis, 1992). Very little is known about the early schooling contexts and experiences affect achievement outcomes. This interaction of school context and socialization is important to consider.

There is growing evidence that African-American male disengagement with schooling develops in the early grades and continues to intensify as they progress through school (Davis, 2005). African-American males consistently fall behind other students in early school performance and lead their peers in school infractions and other negative outcomes. The correlation between these negative educational experiences and school disengagement are surprisingly unclear. From the current literature, it is unclear whether disengagement or achievement is the antecedent (Davis, 2003).

Previous literature on African-American males in the early grades is comparative in nature and examines their academic experiences and outcomes relative to other students. Slaughter-Defoe and Richards (1994) suggested that as early as kindergarten, African-American males are treated differently than other male and female students. Davis and Jordan (1994) found that African-American boys' school engagement reflected in study habits and attendance were positively related to achievement and grades. They also found that remediation, grade retention, and suspensions induce academic failure among African-American males from their preschool years into late adolescence.

**Summary**

The literature review revealed that past research fails to give credence to the historical factors that may have contributed to African-American single mothers' issues. Literature on African-American families continues to be revised and manipulated to serve the needs and conscience of White American (Harry, Klinger & Hart, 2005). It is beyond the scope of this study to provide a detailed account of African-American history, however, Harry, Klinger & Hart (2005) noted that public constructions of the African-American family structure and practice have historically been colored by overwhelming assumptions of deficit, making it difficult to separate the real effects of poverty and historical discrimination from the continuation of deficit stereotypes.

A common finding in resilience research is the power of a caring parent to tip the scale from risk to resilience for young African-American males who are considered at-risk. This study identifies factors that may contribute to school readiness and academic success of young African-American males being raised by resilient single African-American mothers.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative research used a case study methodology, a detailed examination of a subject or population that has been overlooked (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The focus of this study was to explore how resilient single African-American mothers interpret their personal characteristics and acts of mothering to raise successful young sons using racial socialization practices as a tool.

#### **Research Community**

The school district being used for the purpose of this study is located in a suburb of a large metropolitan city. This district serves approximately 104,000 students and is ethnically, economically, and academically diverse. Some of the district's objectives include, but are not limited to, student growth and development, employing quality personnel, creating safe schools, building community relations, and equitable and adequate financial planning for all schools. The district's goals for all students are: 1) acquisition of empirical and technological knowledge and skills; (2) proficiency in oral and written communication skills; (3) aesthetic values; (4) responsible citizenship; (5) social and interpersonal skills; and (6) worthwhile use of leisure time for healthful living.

The study was conducted at a Title 1 elementary school with a population of approximately 890 students. This school was selected as the research site because the majority of the students are students of color and many of them come from single-parent homes. The school selected has a demographic student population that consists of 25

percent African-American, 66 percent Hispanic, and seven percent White, two percent Asian, one percent Native American and 86 percent of the total population is economically disadvantaged.

The community consists of well established neighborhoods, apartments, convenience stores, and restaurants. The majority of the homes are one-story, and some of the apartments are HUD assisted. There are also small churches, storefront multi-culturally owned businesses, pawn shops and grocery stores in this community. Some of the merchants have bilingual employees for their Spanish-speaking customers.

### **Purposeful Sample**

The sample selection of participants in this study represented a purposeful rather than a random sample which sought participants who have experienced the phenomenon being studied. Merriam (1988) states that “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover and gain insight; therefore, one needs to select a sample from participants that will provide the most valuable learning experience. Patton (1990) writes:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases for in-depth. Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (p. 169).

Furthermore, without interaction, purposeful sampling and emergent design are impossible to achieve (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A purposeful sampling of five resilient single African-American mothers raising young sons was the strategy used to guarantee that this study captured their voices to interpret how they influence their sons' academic success and school readiness using racial socialization. For this study, successful young African-American males were defined as elementary aged males who are scoring "at grade level" on their beginning of year and mid-year district benchmark assessment and have no discipline referrals on file. Single African-American mothers were defined as a female person of African descent who is the head of her household and raising her son and there is no other adult living in the household. The father does not live in the home because of separation, divorce, or death (Brown & Davis, 2000; Gantt & Greif, 2009).

After receiving permission from the school district, the principal was contacted and asked to participate in the study. A letter was sent out to all males students that met the study criteria. Only two of the letters were returned, so then after receiving a list of all males who met the criteria, mothers were contacted via telephone and using the phone script (see Appendix B) were asked to participate in the study. Several mothers agreed to meet for the interview but didn't show up. More phone calls were then made to secure the five participants. The participants were then asked to sign the consent form (see Appendix C) and interviews were conducted at a neutral site agreed upon by the participants.

### **Instrumentation**

A qualitative study relies heavily on the researcher, a human, as the primary instrument. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained it this way:

Contextual inquiry demands a human instrument, one fully adaptive to the indeterminate situation that will be encountered. The human instrument builds upon his or her tacit knowledge as much as, if not more than, upon propositional knowledge and uses methods that are appropriated to humanly implemented inquiry: interviews, observations, document analysis, unobtrusive clues, and the like. (p. 187)

I am the primary instrument in this study. However, the interviews served as the primary source of direct information received from the participants' interpretation of the influence they have on their sons' school readiness and academic success using racial socialization. I used an interview guide approach to naturalistic interviews to explore each participant's interpretations relating to raising her son, while permitting other topics to surface. In order to minimize the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering data, I asked interview questions that were open-ended in nature. The interview guide in this study consisted of three main issues: 1) personal characteristics; 2) acts of mothering; and 3) racial socialization as a tool to influence their son's school readiness and academic success. Although the questions were developed prior to the interviews, I was still allowed to remain free to word questions in a way that established a conversational style interview. For example, a conversational style allowed me to develop new questions while continuing the flow throughout the interview.

In each case study, the interviews were conducted with the participants to seek an understanding of their self-perceptions regarding their mothering characteristics and qualities. The interviews were held at neutral sites in the community, which provided a



comfortable setting for conversation. I interviewed each participant once with most of the interviews ranging from one to two hours. Immediately following each interview, notes taken during the interview were organized.

Organizing and reviewing notes were done as soon as possible in order to allow me to recall other things that were not noted when they occurred. Each interview conducted was handwritten as well as audio taped with the consent of the participants. Handwritten notes involved me paying careful attention to what was being said and allowed me to make certain notations without making it known to the interviewee.

In addition, taking notes did not require me to memorize statements made during the interviews, however, it did allow me to highlight important items for later review. On the other hand, using a tape recorder had many advantages, such as assuring completeness, providing the opportunity to review as often as necessary, and assuring that full understanding had been achieved. Tape recording my interviews provided me an opportunity to later review nonverbal cues such as voice pitches and pauses, as well as material for reliability checks. Transcriptions were transcribed by a professional transcription company.

The data collected for this study consisted of five individual lived experiences. The open ended nature of questions allowed individual participants to focus on what information about their experiences they felt were most pertinent to their mothering characteristics that are effective in raising their sons to be school ready and academically successful. This was reflected in the narrative sets of the participants.

After receiving permission to conduct the study at the school site, I gained access to archival data to include, but not limited to, report cards, discipline records, beginning of year and mid-year district benchmark assessment scores to select the six successful African-American males. Once a list of students had been generated, the students' permanent records were reviewed. The sons of the participants met the following criteria: a) African-American ethnicity; b) male; c) between the ages of five and ten during the 2009-2010 school year; d) scored above average on beginning of year and mid-year district benchmark assessments; and e) had no discipline referrals on record and are being raised by a single African-American mother.

The single mothers of the defined were sent a letter asking for voluntary participation in the study. A follow up phone call was given to ask for voluntary participation in the study. Individual in-depth interviews were the primary method of inquiry. Field notes were descriptive in nature and were made during the interviews. They included facts and quotes. No interpretations were included in the notes. A personal log was used to record my reactions to what was seen or heard in the observations or interviews.

Mother responses to interviews were the primary source of data. The purpose of the interviews was to explicate the home and school experience of these five successful young African-American young males in order to explore the influence that their resilient single mothers and racial socialization practices had on their school readiness and current academic success.

## **Data Collection**

After receiving approval to conduct the research from the Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board, the superintendent of the school district was contacted to obtain approval to conduct the study. Once district approval was confirmed, the principal of the Title 1 School was contacted to gain access to the five successful African-American males. Files were collected and the basis of the coding of data was formed. The files included: a) files for keeping track of the people, places, documents, etc.; b) analytic files for emergent coding themes; and c) fieldwork files that contain records of experiences, ideas, mistakes, and problems with the overall research itself. Files were locked and stored in a file cabinet in an office.

## **Research Design**

Wimmer and Dominick (1994) described qualitative research as a term which included several research strategies including interviews, field observations, and case studies. All of the methods had the following characteristics: (1) the design was developed during the study, (2) the research was an integral part of the data, (3) the design was adjusted as the study progresses, (4) the researcher conducted the study in a natural setting, (5) the researcher was the instrument, and (6) theories emerged as part of the process. The study used a case study design to explore the phenomena through the use of a replication strategy.

For the purpose of this study, a case was defined as an in-depth interview with the mothers of the successful African-American males identified for the study. Yin (2003) compares the uses of replication strategy to performing several separate

experiments on related topics. According to this model, if all or most of the cases provide similar findings, there can be substantial support for the development of a preliminary theory that describes the phenomena (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Drawing from Patton's (1990), three basic approaches to collecting qualitative data, standardized open-ended questions were used to interview the mothers of the five successful African-American males. During the interviews I heard about the mother's perceptions of the influence they have on their son's school readiness and academic success. Individual interviews were conducted with the mothers to explore their perceptions of the factors that influence the school readiness and academic success of their sons. A semi-structured interview format and interview guide was used to direct data gathering (Bodgan & Biklen, 1982). The interview guide contained questions grouped according to categories. They included individual, school, family, and community related questions. (See Appendix A).

Participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. Archival data containing their report card, discipline records, and beginning-of-year and mid-year district benchmark assessment scores were examined to support the information provided by the mothers. This archival data was not be used quantitatively, but strictly as a means of supporting data.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), it is impossible to fully understand human behavior without understanding the framework within which participants interpret their thoughts and behaviors. My research was grounded in the assumption that

features of the social environment are constructed as interpretations by individuals. These interpretations tend to be temporary and situational. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) asserted that qualitative research is multi-purpose in its focus, and involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Qualitative methods allowed me to understand from the perspectives of the participants the complexity of their situations as well as the meaning of the events in their personal lives. The importance of setting, context and the participants' own frames of reference was emphasized to allow the emergence of patterns and themes (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Chester, Jones, Zalot & Sterrett, 2007). Lastly, my research attempted to value subjective, personal meaning, and voices to this population of mothers.

Being the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, I was able to share in the world of the participants and interpret what I experienced there. It was necessary that I made sense of the data to begin to understand the phenomenon studied. I used the elements of categorizing to analyze the data. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), categorization can be accomplished most efficiently when categories are identified in such a way that "they are internally as homogeneous as possible and externally as heterogeneous as possible" (p. 349). Thus, as the researcher, I examined, broke down, compared, and categorized the data. The categorizing process for this study began with a search within individual narrative sets for data concerning broad topics, while I re-examined the categories for overlapping. The set of categories explored possible relationships among other categories. The first categorical topics were the participants personal and employment background. The discussion of personal characteristics and

acts of mothering were the next topic categorized. The final topic was the use of racial socialization practices. From these core categories, themes emerged.

The interviews transcribed produced 60 pages of data. Data analysis began with the archival data of the young African-American males. I read each interview three times and some codes and themes emerged from these initial readings.

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

The process of building trustworthiness and credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability is critical in naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to enhance trustworthiness and credibility in this study, I used an audit trail that reflected triangulation of the data through the use of audio taped interviews, written field notes, and archival data. This procedure helped me preserve the data in an understandable and retrievable form. In an effort to meet ethical standards, I assured my participants privacy, confidentiality, and inclusiveness. I also encouraged my participants to engage in member checks to review and clarify construction developed by myself, and if necessary, to revise these constructions.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility in naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is a process which involves participants verifying data and interpretations collected through the interviews. One of the many benefits of member checking is provision of assessing intentionality. Member checking also provides participants an opportunity to share additional information, correct errors and interpretations, and gives them an opportunity to evaluate the overall adequacy.

To establish trustworthiness, I conducted member checks with the participants. I tested my preliminary interpretation and conclusions with the participants from whom the data were originally collected. I followed up with them by phone to ensure that the preliminary themes were an accurate representation of their perspectives and experiences. This established credibility in the current study and provided an opportunity for the participants to give feedback and confirm or deny my preliminary interpretations and conclusions about the data.

### **Transferability**

Transferability has been recommended as the qualitative counterpart for external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). They also stated that, “if there is to be transferability, the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make the application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do” (p. 298). This means that the reader of the research report can apply the findings of the research to similar situations in which he or she is involved, although the researcher seeks only to describe the meaning of that particular situation for the participants of the study.

In order for the reader to decide if the findings apply or transfer, I presented in detail the necessary information about this study. It is my hope that my readers are able to transfer different aspects of my study to situations in which they are involved. However, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited, the transferability will depend upon the situation in which the reader chooses to apply the findings of my study.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability, which is the naturalist's substitute for reliability, can be demonstrated by "taking into account both factors of instability and factors of phenomenal design induced change" (p. 299), according to Lincoln and Guba (1985). To establish dependability, it was necessary that I examined the records for accuracy.

Confirmability, or objectivity, was utilized during the data collection and analysis phases to verify and construct findings that may be important to increase what is already known about single African-American mothers and their sons. To demonstrate confirmability, I maintained a record of the inquiry process, copies of each taped interviews and discussions, notes from interviews, and the hard copies of all transcriptions. I also made these records available to the participants upon request.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

This data analysis will present the voice of five single African-American mothers and their interpretation of their mothering characteristics and qualities in raising successful young sons through their eyes. In this study, as the researcher, I used actual words of the participants to tell their story in hopes of providing a rich representation of the ideas presented. I attempted to tell each mother's story through data from interviews, field notes, and archival data. In order to make meaning of the data, I chose to organize the data in the following manner: (a) an introduction of each participant, (b) a presentation of themes arranged categorically supported by the data from the individual interviews, and (c) overall responses to the research questions. The participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

The mothers spoke words that were repetitious and rhythmic in nature in isolated environments. For example, they all talked about balancing work with being a mother, the importance of God, and family values and support. Through an in-depth analysis of thick rich description of experiences that overlapped the experiences of another, and yet another, it became my desire to express these mothers' voices with the same passion and emotion that was observed during the interviews. These passionate narratives told an endearing concern for the educational opportunities of their young sons. The three overall arching research questions to guide this study were:

1. How do single African-American mothers describe their personal characteristics attributed to raising successful sons?
2. How do single African-American mothers exercise and interpret their acts of mothering to raise successful sons?
3. How do single African-American mothers use racial socialization to influence the school readiness of their sons?

The 12 interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended in nature (See Appendix A). They were formulated according to the theoretical framework previously discussed in Chapter II. The individual interviews allowed the mothers to share their stories related to raising successful young sons.

This section begins with a portrait of each participant. There were four major themes that emerged from the interviews with the single mothers. The major themes were: (1) resilient mothers; (2) mothers define success; (3) support systems; and (4) faith in God. There were 12 sub themes that emerged under the major themes. Perseverance, upbringing, and balance were sub themes under resilient mothers. Academic success, high expectations, and positive self-image were the sub themes under which mothers define success. Positive male role models, family and friends, and the church were the sub themes under support systems. Finally, inner strength, prayer, and guidance were the sub themes under faith in God. The mother's responses to the individual interview questions as related to the research questions will then be discussed and the section will be summarized.

**India's Story**

India, a native of the Dominican Republic, is a 25 year old single mother of one son. She has lived in the area since she was 12 years old and grew up with both parents and a younger sister and brother. India has a bachelor's and a master's degree in business administration and currently works as a project manager for a large company. She is very outspoken and confident and has worked hard to provide a good life for her young son.

India loved school and was very successful in school. She graduated at the top of her class in high school and participated in many extracurricular activities. Her parents pushed her to do well in school because they did not want her to have a hard road like they did. India's fondest school memory was when she had the leading role in a school play in elementary school and received a standing ovation at the end of her performance.

India described her son as a smart, loving, sometimes rambunctious little boy. She also stated that he was the joy of her life and she couldn't imagine life without him. Although, she had hoped to be married before she had kids, she wouldn't trade her experience as a mother for anything in the world. She said as hard as it is some days, when he comes up to her and gives her a big wet kiss on the cheek that makes everything better.

India defined success for her son as him being determined to do things himself and never giving up on anything. She started reading to her son while he was in the womb and has continued reading as a daily practice. In order to teach her son to be

independent and successful, she believes in showing him how to do something, working with him for a little while, then making him do it on his own.

Some of the challenges India discussed about being a single mother were trying to find a good job and balancing everything to spend quality time with her son. She also stated that finding a good school for her son to attend was another challenge. A major concern was with having enough time to feed him properly, read to him, and get him to bed at a decent hour. Some days, she has projects that require her to work late, so her parents pick her son from school and help him with his homework, feed him, give him a bath, and put him to bed until she gets there to pick him up.

Discipline is one of the most challenging tasks for India. She believes in using time out and taking away privileges versus spanking. Talking about wrong choices and consequences is also one of the ways India chooses to handle discipline with her son. She uses spanking as a last resort and stated that she has only had to spank him a couple of times.

When asked about the positive role models in her son's life, she immediately acknowledged her mom and dad. She spoke very highly of the quality time they spend with her son and the positive support they provide. Her parents provide her son with educational toys and give him lots of love and attention. She feels like her parents are her support system in raising her son and she is very grateful.

Outside of school, India enjoys taking her son to the park to feed the ducks and enjoy the outdoors. They also spend time drawing together. India is also teaching her son

about responsibility by having him help to care for their pet parakeets and work in their small garden.

India believes that she and her family have been a positive influence for her son's school readiness. She believes that her family instilled a sense of pride about the importance of education in her and they are continuing that legacy with her son. Her family is from the Dominican Republic, and they were not as privileged to good schools. Her dad only had a third grade education because his family could not afford to send him to school. Her mom obtained an associate degree in nursing and she had to fight hard to do so.

India stated that her parents kept her son from the time he was born until the age of two, while she completed school and worked. When he turned two, she started him in a local daycare. She didn't feel like he was learning much at the daycare, so when he turned three, she moved him to a church preschool. India was so pleased with this particular preschool that her son continued there until he began kindergarten.

India talked about the importance of helping her son with his homework. When her son gets home from school she allows him some time to unwind before they start homework. She sits with him and goes over the work, and then she allows him to work independently. Once he has worked independently, he is free to ask for help on anything he isn't clear about.

India teaches her son to be proud of his heritage. She teaches him that he is actually biracial because she is from the Dominican Republic and his father is Black. They go to the Dominican Republic every summer to visit relatives and learn about that

part of his heritage. She also likes taking him to the Black History museum in the city, and she reads him stories about prominent Black people. India already sends her son messages that he can become whatever he wants and to never let anyone tell him anything different.

### **Patricia's Story**

Patricia, the second participant, is a 40 year old single mother of one elementary school aged son and has lived in the area all of her life. She is a secretary for the front office of an elementary school. She is typically shy, but says she can be outgoing around family and friends. Patricia has an associate's degree in computer programming and aspires to go back to college one day to complete her bachelor's degree. She said she will go back once her son is older so that she will hopefully inspire him to attend college.

Patricia defined success for her son as him receiving a good education, becoming a good citizen, and being happy at whatever he does. Patricia believes that keeping positive influences around her son will help him to stay on track and become a successful young man. Education is so important to Patricia because she wasn't able to complete college once she had her son, so she hopes that he will be able to attend college if he desires.

Patricia talked about raising a male without a father figure as her greatest challenge. Although her father is active in her son's life, she feels like sometimes her son asks questions or is involved in situations that she doesn't quite know how to handle. Some other challenges she discussed were time management and discipline. Patricia

stated that trying to juggle her work schedule with his homework and extracurricular activities can be difficult. She tries to keep their schedule consistent so that he knows what to expect.

Patricia's son has several positive role models in his life. She stated that although he doesn't see his father on a regular basis, whenever he does, it is a positive interaction. Her dad, her uncles, clergy and friends all provide positive influences for her son. He sees his grandfather every weekend, and they do lots of fun activities together like playing golf, attending car shows, and going to the movies.

Patricia stated that they are active in their church, so many of the deacons and young men in the church are also positive influences in her son's life. They take him to the movies and play ball with him once a week. Attending church or sporting events are some of the things they do regularly.

Patricia stated that her son began attending a quality child care center at the age of six weeks because she had to return to work. He continued at this child care center until he began kindergarten. Patricia was very pleased with the things he learned and feels that he was adequately prepared for public school. He knew all of his letters, sounds, and numbers upon entering kindergarten and was one of the top students in his class.

Patricia places great importance on helping her son to be successful with his school work. She sits with him every night for at least an hour to complete homework or to practice areas that he may need improvement. When her son gets home from school, she said he usually eats a snack and takes a short nap before beginning homework. She

has noticed that this works well because he is more energized when they get started. Her son gets rewarded when he works hard at his homework by being able to go outside and play or play his favorite video game.

Culture is very important to Patricia because she grew up in a predominately White school and dealt with racism quite often. She has very candid talks with her son about the possibility of him being treated unfairly because he is Black and male. One of the things she stresses to her son about his race is that he needs to be proud of whom he is and never let anyone break his spirit. They attend Black History programs in the community, and she shares cultural literature with her son regularly.

### **Shaun's Story**

Shaun is also a native of this area. She is single and also has one son in elementary school. At 34 years old she works full time overnight for a major corporation and she is currently in school working toward her bachelor's degree in business.

Shaun stated that she loved school but was not very smart. She said she had to study very hard just to get C's. Her parents were not educated and did not place much value on education. Shaun wishes they had been more active in her education and maybe she would be further along than she is today. She was popular in school and enjoyed hanging out with her friends and attending parties. Shaun is trying to instill better habits in her son while he is still young, so that hopefully he will not have to struggle like she did.

She described her son as a very bright, charming little boy. Shaun said that he did everything ahead of schedule, and she believes his future can't help but to be bright. She



said she knew there was something special about him from the moment she saw him.

There was a look in his eye like he was saying “Hello world I am here, and I am ready.”

Shaun said that her son makes friends easily and is liked by everyone he meets. He never meets a stranger. She is truly proud to be his mother.

Shaun defines success for her son as him being independent, responsible, and happy. She believes that there is no limitation to what he can become. Shaun said she is confident that she is raising her son to make good life choices. She believes that if she surrounds him with positive African-American men, he will stay on the right track.

Some of the challenges expressed by Shaun were not having a husband to help raise her son and wanting her son to achieve more than she did. She also talked about having to work long hours and being too tired to play with her son some days. Although, Shaun stated her challenges, she also declared that she will not let anything stop her from being the best parent she can be to her son. The gleam in her son’s eyes when he looks at her outweighs all of the challenges she faces from day to day. She said that he has a smile that will melt your heart and sometimes gets him out of trouble.

Shaun’s son has never attended a formal preschool because she has always fixed her work schedule so that she can be home with him during the day. She has a vested interest in his education and did not trust anyone to do the type of job she could do. She started teaching him at six months old. Shaun says that sometimes her parents would take him on field trips during the day to expose him to culture and arts around the city.

Since Shaun works the night shift, she relies on her parents to help her son with his homework and she goes over it with him in the morning before he leaves for school.

She says that her son is very independent and bright, and homework is usually not a challenge for him. Shaun provides her son with challenging workbooks and books to keep him from getting bored.

Shaun emphasizes the importance of being proud of his Black heritage to her son because she feels that sometimes because he is so smart, some of the teachers try to kill his spirit. She teaches him to be respectful, but not silent. They have a collection of African-American literature on hand because she wants her son to learn about the prominent Black figures that are not taught in the schools.

### **Chandra's Story**

Chandra, the fourth participant, is a 27 year old single, unemployed mother of three young sons. Two of her sons are currently in elementary school and one is two years old. She is a native of Michigan, who moved to the area four years ago to provide a better environment for her young sons. She is currently attending school seeking certification in medical billing.

Chandra remembers her schooling experience as grueling. She stated that she was in trouble quite a bit in elementary school and that shaped the rest of her school life. Her parents were divorced early, and she remembers that her mother worked all the time and only came to the school when she was in trouble. She wishes that her mother would have been more concerned about her education. Chandra saw her mother working day and night to provide for her and her siblings, and she did not want that for her children, but she realizes that she is continuing the cycle. She hopes to help her sons break this cycle.

Chandra defined success as her son doing whatever he is good at and striving to be the best. She said her son wants to own his own business one day, and she believes he will accomplish this as part of his success. Chandra also believes that her son will go to college because he has already set high goals for himself.

Some of the challenges Chandra talked about, as it relates to being a single mother, are not having the answers to some of her son's questions and not having enough education to get a good paying job. She also stated that she wished her son had a positive Black male role model in the home, instead of having to rely on community members. The rewards she talked about were how her son helps out around the house and gives her unexpected hugs and kisses at just the right time. She said her son just makes her happy.

The only positive role models that Chandra's son has in his life are the men at their church. Although Chandra spoke highly of these men, she also felt like they have many other obligations and can not spend the quality time she would like for her son to have. But, she is very grateful for their time. She stated that her dad, who lives in South Carolina, calls her son often to encourage him.

The most important influence in Chandra's son's life right now is Chandra herself and her older brother. Chandra stated that she tries to show her boys the importance of perseverance and pride. She constantly tells them to be proud of who they are and their lineage. Their grandfather was a foreman of a construction business although he did not graduate from high school. Chandra explains to her sons that their grandfather never gave up even though times were extremely difficult when he was

growing up. She said that her mother and brother moved in town two months ago to help her with her sons. Chandra's mother comes over and stays with the boys while she goes to school in the evening. She helps with homework and gets the boys ready for bed.

Talking is Chandra's choice of discipline. She believes in telling them what they should and should not do and what is right and wrong. They know exactly what is expected all the time, so she expressed that she doesn't have many problems. If they choose to misbehave, she takes away privileges such as TV, games, outside playtime, and computers. Since they love to do these things, they rarely misbehave.

Chandra's son attended a preschool program in Michigan from the time he was two years old. She feels that he learned all of the basics and enjoyed attending the preschool. Chandra believes that the preschool he attended had him well prepared for public school and has helped him to do well.

Chandra believes that school is very important to her parents because they did not get very far in school. They always encouraged her to do better than they did in school. Now, Chandra encourages her son to go beyond what she did in school. She tells him that she didn't go straight to college out of high school, so now she has to juggle being a mom and trying to get her college degree and she doesn't want him to have to struggle. Chandra helps her son with his homework every night, and she even has his teacher's cell phone number just in case they have any questions about the work.

Chandra tells her son that because he is a Black boy, he is going to be faced with some challenges, but she wants him to learn how to be respectable in any situation. She tells him that if an adult ever disrespects him he is to walk away and let her know, so she

can handle the situation. Chandra's brother comes over often and takes her son to get a haircut and spend time doing "boy things." She is grateful to have this support.

### **Joy's Story**

Joy, the fifth participant, is a native of the area and has two elementary aged sons. She is 31 years old and is single. She is currently unemployed and attends school to obtain her bachelor's degree in education.

Joy's definition of success for her son took on a different meaning from all the other mothers. Her definition of success was him being successful not only financially, but spiritually. She also stated that she wants him to be a powerful role model in his community.

Joy discussed many challenges when it comes to raising a son alone. She discussed having to find a job that paid enough to cover her bills and was conducive to her son's schedule. Patience was another challenge she mentioned. She said sometimes it is hard to be patient with her son when she has so many things on her plate and no one to help her carry the burden. Although Joy discussed the many challenges, she declared there were just as many rewards. She stated that one of the greatest rewards was watching her son beam when he brings home a good report card. Joy also stated that her son loves to do things for her when she least expects. He will make her a sandwich or bring her a favorite magazine to read when he thinks she is feeling stressed.

Joy stated that her pastor and her first lady are probably the most influential role models in her son's life. They help her financially and spiritually. She said they go to the school and have lunch with her son and help with homework sometimes. Joy also feels

like her big sister is a positive role model. Her sister and her best friends take turns picking up the boys and taking them to do fun things, so that Joy can have a break every once in a while.

Joy places a strong emphasis on education. She feels that even though education was very important to her parents, they were not as involved in her education as she wishes they had been. So now, she wants to be there for her sons in every area of their schooling experience. Her parents didn't really sit down with her to do homework, so she makes sure to sit with her sons to show them the importance of their school work.

Joy uses time out as a form of discipline for her sons. She gives them a warning, they talk about it, and then she issues time out based on their age. Her son is six years old, so he has to stay in time out for six minutes. Joy also believes in removing privileges and letting them sit in the room alone to think. She uses spanking as a last resort.

### **Analysis of Findings**

As the lives of these single mothers in this study unfolded, several themes emerged that provided a common link. Although, there were many challenges mentioned by all the mothers in my study, there were just as many rewards for being single mothers of young sons. Therefore, the following major themes were identified; (1) resilient mothers; (2) mothers define success; (3) support systems; and (4) faith in God. The mothers believed they gained their strength and resiliency from their parents. They each believed that their upbringing and educational career has impacted their parenting style. Balancing work, school, and parenting was one of the greatest struggles for all of the

mothers, but because of the support of parents, siblings, friends, and church members, it has been possible for these single mothers to continue their education and work. The mothers also believed that providing their sons with racial socialization is helping them to be successful in a society that views them from a deficit lens. Each of the single mothers expressed their concern about not being able to teach their son the things that only a man can teach, but they feel like the positive male role models in their sons' lives are helping them to be successful in this area. All of the mothers talked about how attending church, and that their faith in God helps them to persevere and plays a key role in raising their young successful sons.

### **Resilient Mothers**

African-American single mothers' public persona is usually reported by the United States Bureau of Census as them being less than ideal parents and citizens (Davis, 2006). An exploratory investigation of parenting effectiveness among 135 single, low-income African-American mothers and found that there are often high levels of effective parenting among African-American female, single parents. This was true regardless of the mother's age, level of income, level of education, or number of children (Davis, Rhodes, & Hamilton-Leaks, 1997).

Collectively, one of the characteristics the five mothers in my study demonstrated was resiliency. Most definitions focus on the strength of the individual, but some defined resilience as the ability to overcome life's challenges. This category captures the experiences of these participants regarding overcoming the adversities of single motherhood. They discuss the challenges and the rewards of being a single

African-American mother raising young sons. They all concurred that being single mothers presents some major challenges at times, but that is countered by the rewarding moments of their sons' outpouring of love and affection and academic success.

Resilience manifested itself differently for each participant based on her worldview and means of coping with life. India, coming from a two-parent middle class family, began to exhibit resilience after her son was born. Her parents are supportive physically, but not financially. She has had to work long hours to make enough money to support herself and her son. India said,

I remember having a lot of sleepless nights to complete school work and projects at work. I cried all the time because I was just so tired. But, I grew up in church, so I knew to call on the Lord, and He heard my prayers. After two long years of what felt like torture, I graduated with my Master's degree and obtained a managerial position in my company.

Retrospective studies of resilient women indicate that they have hope for the future, do not internalize blame and strive to maintain a positive self-image.

Additionally, resilient women are able to build external support systems and foster caring relationships with their children and people outside the family (Wright, 2003).

Joy has proven her resiliency in dealing with the serious medical condition of one of her sons. Her son was born with too much fluid on his brain and was diagnosed with Hydrocephalus. Joy stated that there were days when she felt like giving up and didn't think she could go on, but every time she looked at her son, she knew she had to fight. She said, "I had to let go of my pride and solicit the help of friends and family members to help me get through difficult times." Because she didn't give up, her son is now receiving special services through the public school system and is functioning like a



normal young boy. This experience taught Joy how to advocate for her son in the public schools, and she attributes that to helping both of her sons to be successful in school. Joy stated, “I have really learned how to communicate with the school where my son’s academics are concerned, and I thank God for placing me in this situation.”

Patricia has been resilient in many areas of her life. Although her parents believed education was important, they did not give her a lot of hands on support. She said they would just tell me, “Girl you better make good grades so you can go to college and get a good job.” Patricia says that she is happy they pushed her, but she wished they had come to more of her school events or just given her more direct support. Because her parents weren’t very involved, Patricia had to learn how to be self sufficient when it came to applying for college and getting a job to put herself through college. She feels that this had a positive effect on her parenting because she will be more supportive of her son.

Patricia had her son after completing her second year of college and hasn’t been able to go back to finish her bachelor’s degree which has forced her to settle for a low paying job as a school secretary. She chose this job so that she could be close to her son during the day and she can have the same schedule that he has so that she doesn’t have to pay daycare. Patricia said, “I really wanted a better paying job, but it really works out that I am home with him after school, so that I can help him with homework, and we get to spend quality time during the holidays and summer vacation.”

Chandra has shown resiliency through moving to another state to raise her sons in a better environment. She left all of her family and moved south to try to provide a

better lifestyle for her sons. Chandra said, “The first few months were the hardest. There were days when I thought I had made the biggest mistake of my life, and I started to pack up and go back home.” The only thing that kept her from moving home was the fact that she wanted her sons to be in an environment where there wasn’t so much crime, and she wanted them to have the best educational opportunity available. She didn’t feel like that was possible in her home town, so she knew she had to make this work. Her mother eventually moved to the same city, but for a year, Chandra was here without family, so she is thankful that she had church family to support her. She said, “It was hard when I first moved here because I didn’t know anyone, but I am so thankful that the members of my church came to my rescue and helped me in every area that I needed help in.”

### *Perseverance*

All of the participants felt that they have persevered through many challenges of being single mothers raising sons. They believe that their “do not give up” attitude and perseverance are personal traits that have helped them to overcome challenges associated with single parenting. For these mothers, persevering means doing whatever it takes to make sure their sons have access to positive educational opportunities and positive people.

Joy stated, “I am a strong woman and I am strong willed, so I just keep pushing even when things seem overwhelming.” Patricia added, “I have had to stay strong even when I didn’t know where our next meal was coming from. I have to believe in myself, so my son will learn to believe in himself.” India said, “I don’t ever give up, especially if

someone tells me I can't do something. That makes me even more determined, and I hope to show my son that through perseverance, you can accomplish anything you put your mind to." Shaun stated, "If I didn't keep going when things got tough, I could have lost my son to CPS." There were times when I couldn't afford to keep his clothes clean, we really didn't have any food to eat, and the school started questioning me as a parent. I knew then that I had to step up my game before someone called me an unfit mother."

### *Upbringing*

The participants discussed values that were instilled in them as children and that they are now passing down to their young sons. They all felt like their parents stressed the importance of getting a good education, having good behavior, and working hard to get what they want in life. They believed that their parents set high standards for them and they are setting high expectations for their sons, as well.

Chandra stated, "My parents were not educated, so they were really strict with me and always stressed how they wanted me to get more education than they did. They taught me to believe in myself and God, and that I would succeed at anything." Shaun said, "My parents were good role models for how to be a good person. They helped everyone in our neighborhood by providing food, clothing, or helping them out around the house because we grew up in the projects." India added, "My mom and dad always taught me to be the best that I could be in everything I do."

Patricia explained that her parents were very old school. "My parents didn't play when I was a young child." They would threaten me that if I got in trouble at school, they wanted them to whoop me and when I got home I would get another whoopin. They

also told me that if I go out in the neighborhood and act like I don't have good sense, that the neighbors had their full permission to get me and I would get it again when I got home. Needless to say, I knew how to act when I went somewhere.

### *Balance*

All of the participants discussed how hard it was to balance work, school, and single parenting. They believed that balance is achieved only when you seek help from others. Moreover, when they tried to balance raising their sons on their own, things didn't work out very well, and they became frustrated and overwhelmed with life.

Chandra recalled, "I remember when I moved in my first apartment with my boys, I had to get an extra job to make ends meet. The extra job was at night, so I had to ask my sister to come over and stay with my kids." Joy said, "I am a very proud person, so it was really hard for me to ask for help, but when I came close to having a nervous breakdown I knew that if I didn't get help, I wouldn't be any good to my sons." Patricia cried, "I am so grateful for my church family, for without them, I would not be able to go back to school."

### **Mothers Define Success**

Each of the participants in my study stated that their upbringing and educational trajectory influenced the success they are experiencing raising their sons. Four of the five single mothers in this study grew up in a household with both parents. One of them was raised by her single mother, but stated that her father was active in her life. All of the women felt like their parents wanted them to be academically successful, although they didn't always provide the necessary support. The fact that they all grew up around

people who loved them and tried to tell them the right things to do in life has caused all of these mothers to want the same things for their young sons and work hard to provide their sons with the overall support they will need to be successful academically and socially.

The single mothers all had parents who at least had a high school education except for India whose father only had a third grade education. All of the participants believe that their parents instilled the importance of a good education and wanted them to attend college so that they could get good paying jobs and not have to work as hard as they did. This was a key component for all of the participants in the academic expectations they have for their sons. They believed that the fact that their parents made education a “must have”, they are instilling the same sense of educational pride in their sons.

India grew up in a family where she was told, “If you get anything in life, at least get your education, something for you to fall back on and a sense of pride.” This still rings in India’s ears, and she hears herself repeating the same phrase to her young son. India said, “My son can’t help but to be successful because he comes from a lineage of hard working, successful people.”

Shaun remembers that her parents had very high expectations for her and her siblings, but she doesn’t feel like they pushed her enough. She said, “I wish they would have pushed me to do better and work harder.” Even though she said that she made good grades, she thinks that she could have made better grades if her parents had stayed on her more. So she admits that she pushes her son more because she knows what she could

have done. “I tell my son that if he studies hard now, he will be able to get into any college and become anything he wants to become in life.”

Chandra asserts that although her parents didn’t graduate from high school, they made sure that she didn’t follow in their footsteps. She said she remembers them saying, “Girl, you are not going to be like me. You will graduate from high school if I have to beat you through.” She said it only took a couple of those beatings for her to realize that they were serious so she decided to study and work hard in school. Chandra believes the constant pushing from her parents has caused her to be successful as a person and a parent. She tells her son, “I want you to have more opportunities than I ever had, and I believe you can do anything you put your mind to.”

During their childhood, the participants were instilled with the importance of work. Patricia, Chandra, and Shaun all had jobs during their teenage years to help their families. All of the participants can remember doing chores around the house and helping to take care of younger siblings. Patricia’s son has regular chores that he must complete before he is allowed to go outside or play video games. India instills the importance of work in her son by having him care for their pet parakeets. Chandra’s son likes to help in the kitchen. He volunteers to clean up whenever Chandra cooks dinner because she required him to pick up after himself from the time he was a toddler. The mothers definitely believe that their upbringing has shaped the way they raise their sons and so far it has been a positive experience for them and their sons.

*Socializing Sons for Success*

Another tool these mothers used to promote success in their young sons was racial socialization which has been shown to predict positive outcomes for children, including academic achievement. Racial socialization is defined as the process that African-American parents engage in to raise physically and emotionally healthy children who are Black in a society that views them negatively (Murry, Bynum, Brody, Wilert, & Stephens, 2001).

Racial socialization messages are generally communicated through a combination of family discussions, direct instruction about race, and observations of their parents interacting with people of their own and other races (Murray et al., 2001; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990).

The single mothers in this study all used racial socialization to shape the beliefs, goals, and behaviors of their young sons. They taught their sons about their ethnic heritage, instilled ethnic pride, prepared them for bias and emphasized equality of all races through many modes. All of the participants stated that their parents taught them about race early in life and to be proud of their heritage.

The participants emphatically told how they enjoy talking to their sons about racial and ethnic pride, especially now that the President of the United States is an African-American male. They all discussed the importance of traditional family meals during birthdays and holidays. Most of them stated that they even allow their sons to help out in the kitchen so that they will learn to be self-sufficient.

India started reading books about famous African-American figures while her son was still in her womb. She wanted him to come into the world as a strong, confident Black boy. They also like visiting museums that have cultural displays. Chandra said that most of her son's cultural socialization is done through her church. They attend ethnic related activities such as plays and concerts held at their church.

Many African-American parents believe that education is the only way their children will have opportunities in a world where they are confronted with racial inequalities. Instilling the value of long-term educational achievement is therefore an important socialization message that single mothers need to give to their young African-American sons (Hill, 2001; Marshall, 1995).

The participants in this study talked about how education has been a major factor in their overall success as an African-American female and single mother. India was the only mother who had obtained more than a bachelor's degree. Two of the other mothers had associate degrees, and two were currently in school working on a degree. Each single mother talked about education as a way to break the cycle of poverty and make a better life for themselves.

Each participant discussed how they tell their sons everyday that they are smart and that they can become anything they set their minds to becoming. The mothers also talked about how family members, church members, and friends also relayed the same messages to their sons. Patricia feels that self-worth messages are important because they help her son to believe in himself when he gets teased by peers. She stated that he used to come home crying when he was younger because his peers teased him about his



large ears. After hearing self-worth messages from his mother and other family members, he now tells his peers that his big ears help him to hear information that they might miss and help him to make all A's and B's on his report card. Shaun prays with her son every morning before he gets out of the car and she tells him that he will have a great day.

#### *Academic Success*

The participants were excited to describe their sons' academic success. They mothers were very proud of their sons and had high expectations for them. All of the participants were happy to report that their sons did not get in trouble at school and made good grades.

Patricia's theory about why she felt like her son was being successful was this:

My son is being academically successful because I sit with him when he does his homework to show him that I value education. I also place positive male role models in his life who help him to believe in himself and show him what he can become if he continues to do well in school.

Chandra believes her sons are being successful because of many factors:

My boys are doing well in school because I have set high expectations for them and I tell them that I know they are going to be smarter than me and have a better job than I have. I also started reading with them when they were very little and teaching them their numbers and letters. I also think because I was smart, they got it honestly.

Joy says, “I tell my son that he can be the next President of the United States if he wants to.” We read books about President Obama and Dr. Martin Luther King so that he can see examples of strong Black men. I want him to know that the sky is the limit, and if he studies, he will achieve all of his goals in life.” Shaun believes, “My son does well in school because he knows that he can’t come home with bad grades or conduct because he will be grounded from the things he likes to do.” India said, “I think my son is the smartest boy in his class, and I want him to believe that about himself.”

The mothers all discussed how they want their sons to become happy, hard working members of society. The participants talked about how their parents wanted them to have more than they had, and that is carrying over into how they parent their sons. Joy tells her son, “You can’t play your video games until all of your homework is done and done right.” She said that, “I don’t play when it comes to his school work.” India stated, “I tell my son that if you want the best, you have to be the best.” Chandra explained, “I took my son on the streets and showed him what he would become if he didn’t work hard in school. I showed him the drug dealers and hustlers and told him that most of them don’t ever make it out of the hood once they start.” Patricia said, “You are a child of God, and the only thing you can become is great!” Shaun explains to her son, “The more you learn, the more you earn.” She hopes this will inspire him to reach his goal of becoming an engineer.

### *Positive Self-Image*

One of the factors the mothers attribute to their son’s success is boosting their self-esteem and self-image by surrounding them with positive male and female role

models. The participants also credit racial socialization in assisting their sons' to have a positive self-image.

Patricia tells her son, "You are the most handsome, smart, black young man that I know and I am so very proud of you." India explains how every morning before her son goes to school she says, "Today you will have a great day and you will be the best that you can be!" Joy likes to have her son look in the mirror and say, "I am Black and I am proud and I will achieve all of my goals." Shaun states, "My brother takes my son to the barber shop and shopping and shows him how to look like a positive Black boy." Chandra says, "I just talk to my son about the importance of believing that he can be as successful as any White child in his class and don't ever let anyone say you can't. I want him to know that sometimes people will try to make him think he is less than because he is Black."

### **Support Systems**

With support in a cohesive, nurturing family and community, African-American single mothers can help their sons achieve academic success (Johnson, 1999). Support systems are defined as other assisting, advising adults, beyond the nuclear family who provide economic assistance, emotional support, and most important, advice and assistance in child rearing (Harris, 1999).

Kunjufu (2005) implores single mothers to stay strong and give their sons tough love. Single mothers usually tackle lack of motivation, peer pressure, gangs and other vices alone. Therefore, single mothers should have conferences to derive strength from each other because they are usually worrying and suffering with similar problems.

Mentoring programs that assign professional Black men as role models for young African-American males is essential for enhancing these students' academic and social identity development (Davis, 2003). Some of these programs are school-affiliated with local groups and organizations teaming up with school districts to offer support services and mentoring for African-American boys (Davis, 2003). Positive male presence is meant to counter negative gender role socialization of African-American boys and develop conceptions and expressions of masculinity that match positive behaviors and deportment in school settings which is the primary goal of these interventions (Davis, 2003).

The single mothers in this study were fortunate to have wonderful support systems in place. They all spoke highly of their family as a critical component in their sons' lives and they were grateful to have them around. All of the mothers said if it wasn't for the support they have, they would not be doing very well and their sons would probably not be as successful in school.

India said, "Without the support of my parents I probably would have given my son up for adoption because I did not feel that I was mature enough to be a parent." She is grateful to have such a strong support system in place and says that is how she is able to raise her son successfully.

Joy stated that her sister was like a "second mother" to her son. Her sister goes to the school with her or in her place to stay informed about her nephew's academic progress. She said, "If it wasn't for my sister helping me out, I think that I would have had a nervous breakdown by now. I am forever grateful for her constant support." Joy

also helps her sister out with her children. She says that she and her sister are a “tag team” and they take turns disciplining and having fun with each other’s kids.

One of the greatest challenges single mothers raising boys encounter is teaching them how to become men. Shaun stated that her only real challenge is making sure that he’s confident in himself as a young Black male because there are a lot of things that she can’t teach him. She worries about him having a positive male role model so she tries to be the strongest role model possible by being a leader and setting good examples.

Patricia also expressed a genuine concern about teaching her son to be a man. She feels like there are times when she can’t give him what he needs because she doesn’t understand what it is like to be a man. Although she believes her son has positive male role models in his life, she still worries that he is missing out on important male life lessons. Patricia said, “Sometimes he asks me how come you don’t let me go to the men’s bathroom when we are at the store and I tell him because I don’t want anything bad to happen to him.” Thankfully, Patricia has the support of male church members who come and take her son to sporting events and help him with school work. She said, “The men in our church are wonderful role models for my son, and I thank God everyday for their support.”

Chandra stated that since her brother has moved to the city, she is more confident that her son will learn the lessons he will need to become a man. She believes quality male bonding takes place when her brother takes her son to the barber shop and the car wash on Saturdays. Chandra’s son looks forward to spending time with his uncle and comes home to tell his mom about his adventures. She gets joy when her son comes

home and tells her, “Mom I am going to grow up and be like Uncle John and help take care of our family.” Chandra says this helps her to know that she is doing a good job helping her son to know what it is like to be a good man.

Each of the participants was fortunate enough to be able to provide their sons with a positive adult Black male role model within their family or church circle. They all spoke of how grateful they were to have help with raising their sons and that God had placed people in their lives that were good for them and their sons.

#### *Positive Black Male Role Models*

The participants were all fortunate to have positive Black male role models in their son’s lives. They all said they appreciate what these men do for their sons and how they teach him about becoming a man. The participants’ fathers, brothers, uncles or men from their church were happy to assist the mothers in raising their sons to become positive young men.

Patricia talked about how her dad takes her son fishing and does fun things with him to bond with him. She said, “My son loves going with his Paw Paw to do manly things.” India says, “My brother loves to help my son with his homework, and then they rough house together.” Chandra states, “My pastor is really good with my sons and he even goes to their school to check on them and eat lunch with them.” Shaun said, “I love when my son comes home from an outing with his uncle and says mom I am going to be just like him when I grow up.” Joy says that her dad teaches her son about the importance of having a good work ethic. He takes him to work with him where he is the foreman of a large cooperation.

### *Family and Friends*

All of the participants mentioned that having positive relationships with family and friends creates a great support system for their sons. The participants felt like they could rely on family and friends to help out with raising their sons. They were all thankful to have the variety of help they received from family and friends. Some of the support they receive is babysitting while the participants are at work or school, financial help in times of need, or just spending quality time with their sons. Shaun said, “It is only because of my parents that I have been able to go back to college.” Joy states, “Not only do my parents provide support for my son, they also provide emotional support for me which keeps me grounded and helps me to keep moving forward.” Patricia tells, “If it wasn’t for the support of my family, I don’t think my son would be doing as well as he is doing.” India says, “My parents told me that they will always help me as long as I am helping myself.”

### *Church*

All of the participants talked about the importance of God, attending church, and having members of the church assist them with raising their sons. The participants mentioned having some form of support from their religious community. For example, some participants discussed receiving financial help and assistance with food and clothing. Chandra felt that she depended on her religion for support: “I do depend on going to church because it helps me out a lot. We go to church every Sunday and Bible study every Tuesday.” Patricia depended on a male church elder’s positive relationship

with her son to communicate with him about difficult male issues. She stated, “The men in my church show my son how to be a real man. They help him with homework and answer “men” questions that I don’t know how to answer.” Joy believes that going to church teaches her son how to trust in God for everything. She insisted, “My son watches me pray when things get tough and I tell him when God answers my prayers. I also teach him to ask God for whatever he needs help with.” Chandra said, “My church has helped me with my bills when I was out of work. They also helped me get clothes for my boys.” Shaun said, “Church is the only place that me and my son can go to and have peace and joy and people who love us unconditionally. The older women in the church give me guidance and the men give my son advice on becoming a young man.”

### **Faith in God**

Sullivan’s (2008) study examined the role of spirituality as a success for women. She found that women in the study who possessed a sense of spirituality were able to have a sense of peace, clarity, and strength. The women in this study believed that their sons were capable of being successful academically and were deserving of a quality education. Each of the participants also believed in the power of a positive support system to help her raise her son. They also gave credit to a higher being for the success in raising their sons.

All of the participants believe that their faith in God has brought them this far and they hope that their sons will have the same kind of faith one day. Each participant stated that their parents started them in church young, and it has helped them tremendously throughout their lives.



### *Inner Strength*

The participants in this study believed that they have been able to raise their sons successfully by having the inner strength that God gives them to persevere in struggles. India said, "I am a survivor in Jesus Christ. When obstacles that should bury me come my way, I come out on top." Shaun discussed, "There were times when I wanted to give up, but there was a voice inside of me saying look at your little boy; you can't quit on him. I knew that was the voice of God and that I had to keep on pushing." Joy attributed her success in raising her son by saying, "My God picks me up when I'm feeling down and strengthens me to stand and keep running this race. I am so thankful." Patricia said, "When I start feeling weak, I go to my closet, and I just talk to God. After that, I always seem to feel stronger." Chandra boasted, "I know where my strength comes from; it comes from the Lord. He gives me power that I can't explain."

### *Prayer*

All of the participants talked about how prayer is an important part of their lives and their sons' lives. They say that they were taught to pray at a young age, and they are teaching their sons the same thing. Joy said, "My son watches his grandfather pray and tries to imitate him at night when he prays." Patricia stated, "Me and my son pray together every morning and night. I want him to know that prayer is a way to talk to God." India delights, "My son loves to pray." One time when I was sick, he said, "Mommy I will pray for you so God can make you feel better." Chandra talked about how her sons like to play "church" at home. "They will come home from church and

pretend to be the pastor and the deacons. They will pray and sing and I love to watch them.”

### *Guidance*

The participants all talked about how they receive guidance from the older women in their church. Even though they all have their mothers, they are grateful for the extra guidance. Chandra said, “The women in my church tell stories of raising their sons and how they had to stay on them to keep them on the right path. They help me keep my boys on track with their stories.” India stated, “The older women in my church are good friends with my mom, so they treat me like a daughter. They give me good advice about being a mother.” Patricia said, “I love the women in my church. They help me through tough times and they are there in good times as well.” Joy stated, “It is a blessing to have positive women role models in the church. I try to follow in their footsteps.”

### **Research Question #1**

#### **How do single African-American mothers describe their personal characteristics attributed to raising successful sons?**

All of the participants believed that their upbringing had a major impact on the way they raise their son to be successful. They all believe that their parents laid a foundation that deemed education to be an important factor in living a successful life. The importance of education and being responsible was instilled in them from the time they were very young. Now, these mothers are instilling the same values in their sons. They all believe that they were brought up to be responsible, independent young women and this attributes to the success they are having raising their sons.

Each of the participants talked about the importance of having their parents' love and support throughout their lives. They feel that because their parents have played an important role in their lives, they are able to handle the challenge of being single mothers raising sons. All of the participants except for Chandra grew up in a two parent home. Even though Chandra didn't have both parents in the home, she stated that both parents were very active in her life. Shaun reported, "My parents came to all of me and my siblings events at school and made us feel special," which has a direct influence her participation in her son's schooling. Joy stated that her parents attended a Historically Black College & University (HBCU) and had dreams that she and her sister would follow in their footsteps. Although Joy was accepted to an HBCU, she chose not to attend because she found out a few weeks after she graduated high school that she was pregnant with her first son. She said her parents were disappointed, but they continued to support her and stood by her side.

The participants also told how their parents taught them about being responsible at an early age. All of the participants except for one discussed their weekly chores and most of them remembered having jobs to help support their families. The mothers believed that having such responsibilities when they were growing up has helped them to learn how to juggle motherhood, work, and school. They were all happy to have had those experiences while they were young. Patricia remembered having to have dinner ready and the house clean by the time her parents got home from work. She started cooking at the age of 12 and began cleaning a few years before that. Chandra worked outside of the house from the time she was 15, so she didn't have too many chores. She

said that her parents wanted her to continue to do well in school although she had a job, so they omitted some of her chores.

Having responsibilities at a young age influenced all of the mothers' personal characteristics in a positive manner. They all believe that this created a work ethic that will always cause them to provide for themselves and their sons. Each of the participants complained about doing chores and having to work, but they were also taught to be respectful to adults, so they never argued with their parents about their dislikes. They all said that they realize as children, they thought their parents were just being mean, but now they realize that it was to make them better adults. Now they have started teaching their sons the same important lessons although they understand their frustration.

These mothers all believed that their personal characteristics have a direct correlation with the success of their son. They believe that their personalities were shaped by the way they were brought up. Courage, respect, and work ethic were characteristics that all the single mothers possessed. They all feel that their parents did a wonderful job of raising them to be strong, responsible, and independent, and all of these characteristics have helped them to do well despite their circumstances. Each of the participants stated that they hope to be able to shape their sons into responsible, respectful, hard working young men who will overcome any adversity that life presents.

## **Research Question #2**

### **How do single African-American mothers exercise and interpret their acts of mothering to raise successful sons?**

All of the participants believed that their perseverance through all of the ups and downs that come with single parenting attribute to their sons' success. They also do their best to teach their sons about being responsible and respectful at all times. All of the participants believe that they try to give their sons plenty of love and attention so that they will grow up and know how to give and receive love and be healthy and happy.

All of the participants discussed challenges in trying to raise boys to become men. Even though this was a challenge for all of the mothers, they promised to do whatever it takes to make sure there are positive men in their sons' lives. The mothers talked about how the men in their church stepped up to be positive role model in their sons' lives. Raising their sons in church was a common thread among all the participants. They all said that God is the head of their lives and without him they would not be doing as well as they are doing Patricia said:

My son loves going to Bible study on Tuesdays because he has a mentor who helps him with homework and checks on him to see how he is doing. He also looks forward to going to church on Sunday because our pastor is one of his idols. After church he goes up to the pastor, hugs him, and tells him that he wants to be like him when he grows up.

The mothers also feel that they do a good job of placing positive adult male African-American role models in their sons' lives. Friends and church members serve as mentors for their sons and take them to do male bonding activities. Shaun said, "My dad likes to

take my son to play golf, so that they can have male bonding time.” All of the mothers were happy to have men to be father figures in their sons’ lives.

Although the mothers discussed that it was challenging to discipline their sons, they feel like they do a good job, and their support systems also help them when necessary. The mothers said they don’t like to use spanking, but they will use it if it is necessary because they don’t want their sons to be out of control. They all agreed that they would much rather issue punishment than have the court system issue punishment. All of the mothers mentioned that they don’t ever pass the buck on consequences because they don’t like making idle threats, and they want their sons to respect them as their mother.

All of the mothers believe that their acts of mothering consist of using support systems and their faith to overcome any obstacles in order to raise their sons to become successful. They all spoke of giving their sons love, attention, and positive messages. Surrounding them with positive loving people is also one of the ways the mothers believed they are able to raise successful sons.

### **Research Question #3**

**How do single African-American mothers use racial socialization to influence the school readiness of their sons?**

Each participant in the study made reference to preparing her son for positive schooling experiences by providing positive messages about self- image as young African-American males. They all reported that at one time or another, they tell their sons that they are a smart and don’t let anyone tell them anything different. These

mothers constantly tell their sons that they believe in them, and they want them to believe in themselves. Most of the mothers have told their sons that teachers might treat them unfairly because of the color of their skin. They also told their sons to always be respectful. The mothers are trying to teach their sons to believe in their ability to overcome any adverse situation that they might come up against.

Joy talked about having to deal with one of her son's teachers when he was in kindergarten. She stated that the teacher was always looking for a reason to write something negative about her son in his daily folder. Joy decided to go to the school and volunteer in the classroom and the library. Once the teacher saw that she was involved, she stopped looking for reasons to write in his folder and used him as a helper in her class. All of the mothers talked about visiting their sons' schools from time to time so that teachers and administrators would know that they are genuinely concerned about their sons and education.

The single mothers also talked about exposing their sons to different cultural events in the community. Chandra stated that, "We attend Black History programs and other cultural events at our church." Most of the mothers also read books to their sons about famous African-Americans. They wanted to make sure that their sons know about prominent African-Americans since they seldom learn about them in school. Patricia talked about her son going to the barber shop and the basketball courts with his uncle and men from the church. She said her son really valued those experiences because he comes home and talks about everything that happened and is truly excited to be around Black people, especially men.

These single mothers all discussed how they made sure to provide preschool experiences for their sons, whether formal or informal. Chandra and Patricia's sons attended formal preschools that prepared them for kindergarten. The mothers were please with the programs and felt like their sons were well prepared. The other mothers provided informal pre-schooling for their sons, but they felt like their sons were equally prepared. One of the mothers spoke of using *Your Baby Can Read* videos and another mother said that her mother had been an educator so she taught her son everything he needed to know before entering kindergarten. The mothers were proud to say that they believe those experiences have helped their sons to be successful thus far.

Each participant felt that the use of racial socialization and preschool experiences have played major roles in the success of their sons. They wanted their sons to be ready not only academically, but socially. All of the mothers expressed the importance of making sure their sons were prepared for the public school experience. They wanted their sons to know how to read, write, and behave. Shaun said, "I want my baby to break the stereotype that all little black boys are bad and can't learn." The mothers were all adamant that they were going to instill a sense of pride about being Black into their sons so that if they were ever faced with discrimination, they would be prepared. All of the mothers told their sons that sometimes people aren't going to treat them fairly because they are Black, but to remain respectful and allow the mothers to handle these instances.

### **Summary**

All of the mothers in the study believed that their parents had a direct effect on their character, which has a direct effect on the parenting of their sons. They all were



glad to have parents who cared and deemed education to be important. Each participant believes that because education was a major focus in their upbringing, they are consciously and subconsciously focusing on education with their sons. The mothers all talked about wanting their sons to be more successful educationally than they had been. Although India has a master's degree, she understands that she had to struggle to earn it because of pregnancy during her course work. So, she hopes that her son will complete as much education as he desires before getting married or having a child. Church and family were also important parts of the participants' upbringing and are still very significant in their lives. They attribute their faith in God and church attendance to being able to persevere in tough times and be good single parents to their young sons. The mothers all mentioned, "If it had not been for the Lord on my side, I don't know where I would have been," They were quick to give God all of the praise and credit for the success they are having while raising their sons and for the success their sons are experiencing in school.

Each participant believes that keeping her son active in church and extracurricular activities has helped to keep him on the right track for success. They also believe that placing good male role models in their lives helps them to learn how to become strong African-American young men. These mothers also believe that they are trying to be leaders themselves, so they teach their sons about being responsible and respectful. All of the mothers talked about giving their sons responsibilities around the house. They believe this will help their sons to value and appreciate their lifestyle. All of

the mothers also placed great importance on teaching their sons how to be respectful to all adults, especially their mothers.

The single mothers discussed the importance of making sure their sons grow up to be proud of their heritage. They talk to them about possible racism that may occur in the schools or communities and tell them to never disrespect adults. The mothers also take their sons to cultural events in the community and read books about famous African-Americans to teach them about their heritage. The men who support these single mothers also provide cultural exposure for the boys, by taking them to barber shops and sporting activities and events.

Each mother also talked about the importance of preparing her son for kindergarten and how preschool experiences helped him to be successful. The mothers believe that teaching their sons about education early in life has had a positive effect on their schooling experience. They again attribute this to their upbringing and the value that their parents placed on education for them. All of the mothers were either in school or had been back to school, and they believe it's important for their sons to witness how important education is to their families.

I was not surprised that these mothers repeatedly spoke of their upbringing, education, support systems, and faith in God as keys to their personal characteristics and acts of mothering as related to being single parents raising a young sons. Racial socialization also seemed to come very natural for all of the mothers based on the way they were raised. They remember their parents teaching them to be proud of being Black and teaching them about famous African-Americans, historical and current. Although,

none of the mothers spoke about racism being directed toward their sons, they did say that they had experienced some form of racism growing up and wanted to prepare their sons for the possibility of unfair treatment from society. I, like the five mothers in my study, believe that my upbringing, education, support systems, and faith in God are all factors that have influenced my success, as well as the success of my children.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter includes a summary, conclusions, and recommendations for future research and practice. As I describe in Chapter I, this study focused on the following research questions: How do single African-American mothers describe their personal characteristics attributed to raising successful sons? How do single African-American mothers exercise and interpret their acts of mothering to raise successful sons? And how do single African-American mothers use racial socialization to influence the school readiness of their sons?

I investigated these questions through in-depth, open-ended, face-to-face interviews with five single African-American mothers raising young sons. As I collected and transcribed the data, I compared and categorized this data. I also investigated the literature I felt would be relevant to the study of African-American single mothers raising young sons.

The literature review section began with the background of resilience theory research from a strengths perspective and racial socialization. Then, I went on to investigate the historical context of single African-American mothers and single African mothers and raising sons today. The role of religion in the lives of single mothers was also investigated through the literature. Finally, I looked at literature related to African-American males in education today and the early educational experiences of these boys.

Based on the analysis from these guiding questions, I came to the following conclusions:

- These single African-American mothers attribute their upbringing to having a direct impact on their personal characteristics and the way they are choosing to raise their sons. These mothers believed that their parents placed a great deal of importance on education, responsibility, and respect when they were growing up, and now that plays a big part in how they are able to be successful in raising their sons.
- Support systems and faith in God are key components in how these single mothers interpreted their acts of mothering successful sons. They surround their sons with positive people which includes family, friends, and church family.
- Racial socialization prepares young African-American males for potential unfair treatment in society due to their ethnic background. The mothers also believe racial socialization builds their sons' self-esteem and self-confidence while teaching them respect for themselves and others.

### **Summary**

As the results of the study are presented, the guiding questions serve as a focal point of the research. The personal characteristics that these single mothers attributed to raising successful sons, and their the acts of mothering and use of racial socialization were the areas that I focused on with the participants. Much of the research focuses on single African-American mothers and sons who are not being successful, so this study was aimed at countering those studies and shedding light on the ones that are being successful.

The themes that emerged from the study were resilient mothers, mothers define success, support systems, and faith in God. Sub-themes that emerged under resilient mothers were perseverance, upbringing, and balance. The sub themes under mothers define success were socializing sons for success, academic success, and positive self-image. Sub themes for support systems were positive Black male role models, family and friends, and church. Finally, the sub themes under faith in God were inner strength, prayer, and guidance.

### **Resilient Mothers**

Resilient mothers emerged as an ongoing theme among all participants, and this resiliency factor strengthened the mothers' ability to rebound from obstacles in order to raise successful young sons. The development of resilience was a daily effort for these mothers as they confronted the adversity of their lives. The challenges and stressors from coping with lack of education, support, or employment, at times, revealed the inner strength in their personal characteristics. The risk factors in these experiences proved to be daunting but surmountable. The narratives of these mothers depict their appreciation for these experiences in their lives. The strengths and coping skills that emerged from these experiences gave these mothers a feeling of control over their circumstances. They all mentioned how they had to persevere in tough times to show their son that giving up is not an option. They also talked about how important their upbringing was to the way they are choosing to raise their sons. Their parents had a positive effect on their career and educational trajectories. The mothers also told how they were grateful for their families to help them balance their lives as single mothers.

Specifically, Joy has proven her resiliency in dealing with the serious medical condition of one of her sons. Joy stated, “There were days when I felt like giving up and I didn’t feel like I could go on. I had to let go of my pride and ask for help from friends and family to help me get through the difficult time and I did.” India showed resiliency by having to work more than one job and then work long hours once she got a better job. She said, “My parents were willing to help me care for my son physically, but not financially. They told me that I needed to figure out how to make sure I had enough money to care for my son no matter what it took.”

### **Mothers Define Success**

Mothers define success emerged as a major theme from all of the participants and they were thrilled to share what they believed and perceived as success, for their sons. They discussed socializing their sons for success, academic success and positive self-image. These factors were important to these mothers as it related to their sons’ success. They all wanted their sons to know the importance of their heritage and how to handle themselves appropriately in a racial encounter. This was important to these mothers because they do not want their sons to ever be disrespectful to adults because that could create hardships for the rest of their lives. The mothers believed that their sons were being successful academically because of the high expectations for them to be the best they can be. Racial socialization was a tool that these mothers used to improve the self-image of their sons. They surround their sons with positive male role models to show them what they are capable of becoming.

Patricia felt like her son was being successful because she sits with him everyday to help him with homework and show him that she values education. She tells him, “ I want you to go further than I can ever dream of going. I want you to become whatever your little mind can dream of becoming and education is the key.” Shaun says, “I have high expectations for my son and he knows that if he doesn’t do well in school, all of his privileges will be taken away until his grades improve.”

### **Support Systems**

Support system was a theme that all of the participants agreed was to be one of the most important aspects of single parenting that helped them to raise successful sons. They were thankful for support from family and friends, positive black role models, and the church. The mothers all had support from at least one family member and/or friends. They attribute the relationship their sons have with at least one positive Black male role model to their sons’ positive self-image. All of the participants were beyond grateful for the support they receive from the church. They discussed receiving clothes, food and even financial support from their churches. The support these mothers receive help them to keep their lives balanced, and, therefore, they are able to give their sons the best they have to give them.

Patricia expressed a concern about teaching her son to be a man. She feels like there are times when she can’t give him what he needs because she doesn’t understand what it is like to be a man. She said, “The men in our church are wonderful role models for my son, and I thank God everyday for their support in helping me to raise my son.”



Chandra stated that since her brother has moved to the city, she is more confident that her son will learn the lessons he will need to become a man. She gets joy when her son comes home from an outing with her brother and says, “Mom, I am going to be just like Uncle John when I grow up.”

### **Faith in God**

The participants in the study all depended on their spiritual beliefs and prayer as sources of support. The strength that these mothers derived from their faith or spiritual beliefs provided a conduit for the healthy release of daily stressors for the mothers in this study. They communicated the importance of their relationship and belief in a higher power; however, they did not express an affiliation with a particular religion. They sought strength through prayer in times of crisis, but they also sought prayer to thank God for all he has done. Joy stated, “I just walk and talk to God because I know he can work it out for me and my son.” India said, “I am a survivor in Jesus Christ. When obstacles that should bury me, come my way, I come out on top.” Patricia says, “When I start feeling weak, I go to my closet, and I just talk to God. After that, I always seem to feel stronger.”

### **Relation to Theoretical Framework**

Resilience theory from a strengths perspective was used to support the guiding questions that allowed me to investigate the experiences of five single African-American mothers raising successful sons. A study by Bernard (2004), approached resilience from a perspective of strength, instead of weakness and suggests that resiliency research should first strive to determine how and why individual strengths emerge, and second, to

identify protective factors that permit individuals to strive in spite of adversity. The objective of resiliency research is to discover how certain individuals are able to adapt and bounce back from risk factors and challenges in life (Shene, 1999; Brown, 2008). The focus of this study was to discover how resiliency occurred in single African-American mothers raising successful son. Each of the mothers discussed overcoming adversity throughout their lives and being stronger because of their struggles.

Religion was one of the factors that the participants discussed repeatedly as a critical factor in their success and their son's success. They believed that the support of their church community played a major role in their ability to overcome the challenges that are associated with single parenting. The participants also spoke of their prayer life and their church attendance as a means of being able to conquer obstacles that come against them. Positive role models are also an important part of their religious affiliations. The participants believe that the older women in the congregation provide the guidance they need to raise successful young sons, and the men in the church provide positive experiences that help their sons become positive young men.

According to Caughey, O'Campo, Randolph, and Nickerson (2002), African-American parents routinely engage in racial socialization practices as part of their parenting repertoire. There is a growing body of evidence supporting the notion that the more parents engage in racial socialization practices, the more their children show improved socio-emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes. The mothers in this study believe racial socialization has contributed to the success of their sons because it

helps them to believe in themselves when no one else does. They also believe that racial socialization teaches their sons to respect adults and themselves.

### **Discussion**

This study provides useful information to inform teachers, administrators, and researchers of how resilient single African-American mothers raise successful sons. Resilience theory from a strengths perspective and racial socialization provided a tool for shaping my inquiry, so I could examine the acts of mothering and personal characteristics that these mothers feel attribute to raising successful sons.

As the researcher, I investigated the literature that I believed would be pertinent to the study of single African-American mothers' influence on the academic success and school readiness of their young sons. The participants in this study believed their voices could benefit the quest for improving the academic achievement of young African-American males. The participants' conversations were a direct rebuttal to past research from the educational system's perspective. There were four major themes that emerged from the interviews with the single mothers. The themes were: (1) resilient mothers; (2) mothers define success; (3) support systems; and (4) faith in God. Woven into the discussion of each theme are the answers to the study's research questions of (1) how do single African-American mothers describe their personal characteristics attributed to raising successful sons, (2) how do single African-American mothers exercise and interpret their acts of mothering to raise successful sons, and (3) how do single African-American mothers use racial socialization to influence the school readiness of their son.

*Theme one: Resilient mothers.* The findings of this study suggested that upbringing and parental support increase the likelihood that individuals can overcome adversity. Each of the participants believed that their parents were instrumental in their education and are currently providing support in their son's education. All of the mothers were sure of that because of the positive reinforcement and support they received from their parents, they were and are able to go on when they really feel like giving up. The single mothers in the study had to exhibit resilience in many areas of their lives. Some of the mothers had to postpone college when they had their sons, which makes their lives more complicated personally and professionally. They are not able to get high paying jobs without degrees, and they have to juggle going to school, working, and parenting their sons. They also have to worry about raising a boy to be a man. Sometimes they are faced with situations or questions that they do not feel confident to handle because of their gender.

The single mothers believe that their upbringing and parental influences play direct roles on their characters as people and single mothers. They also believe that the fact that their parents made education a priority in their homes has influenced them to do the same for their sons. They felt that their parents were involved in their education, but they want to be even more involved with their sons than their parents were with them.

Another factor that contributed to the resiliency in these single mothers was their belief system. They all believed that God was their strength and would see them through any situation. They were all raised in church, so they had a background that provided them with the spiritual and emotional support needed to overcome adversity. The

mothers attend church regularly, seeking support from church family and God to help them to be the best parent, they can possibly be to their sons.

*Theme two: Mothers define success.* The participants defined success as shaping their sons to be respectful, responsible, independent, and happy. They hope to accomplish this by surrounding them with positive people and supporting and encouraging them in everything they attempt. The mothers can still hear the positive self messages from their parents ringing in their ears, and they hope to give their sons the same types of messages that will stay in their ears for the rest of their lives, as well. The mothers felt like this was one act of mothering that they believe has a direct impact on the success of their sons.

Racial socialization is another tool that all of the mothers in the study accredit to the success of their sons. They believe that racial socialization prepares their sons for possible unfair treatment from society based on their ethnic background. All of the mothers talked about exposing their sons' to books, museums, or community activities to inform them about their cultural heritage. The mothers in the study also spoke of using self-worth messages with their sons to increase their self-confidence in a society that often views them in a negative light.

*Theme three: Support systems.* The single mothers in the study spoke highly of the support systems they had in place to help raise their sons. They also attribute the success their sons are experiencing to the support they receive from family, friends, and church members. The mothers are all fortunate enough to have either family or church members who play instrumental roles in the upbringing of their young sons. The mothers

discussed that sometimes these support people helped her out by, caring for her son while she worked, taking him to places in the community, helping with homework, and spending quality time with him. Each participant felt that they were being successful mothering their sons because of the support they were receiving.

*Theme four: Faith in God.* One of the most recurring themes is their faith in God and their belief that He gives them the strength to keep pushing even when they don't feel like it. The support they receive from church members, particularly males, is also a positive factor in raising their sons. These men not only provide a positive male father figure, but they are also very active in the boys' schooling and extracurricular activities. Church is also a place that helps the mothers socialize their sons. They attend musicals, plays, and fun events at church which help the mothers to teach their sons about their heritage. Churches and other organizations sometimes provide parental support, surrogate fathers, assistance with daily needs for child care, health care, and transportation. Places of worship can also serve as major socializing agents through nonreligious activities such as scouting and girls' or boys' clubs and fulfill the educational role through Sunday school, schools run by churches, and Vacation Bible School.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The following are recommendations based on the findings of this study:

**Recommendation One:** *More service providers need to offer support groups, counseling, and other activities that support single mothers raising sons in their efforts toward resilience.* The reality of single parenting threatens the family's ability to be

resilient. All of the mothers in this study, at some point, encountered potential risk of not being able to care for their sons' everyday needs due to lack of employment or education. To facilitate resilience in single mother headed households, educators and service providers should concern themselves with the effects of single mothers raising young sons by developing social outlets in the form of support groups to facilitate their resilience.

**Recommendation Two:** *Schools and teachers need to engage in more culturally responsive teaching practices to improve the overall academic achievement for African-American males and improve the home/school connection.* The mothers in this study used racial socialization to socialize their sons for success in dealing with potential racial encounters and to improve their son's self image academically and socially. Teachers should also use these practice to improve the academic outcomes for African-American males in their classrooms to help these students see the connection school has with their home lives. African-American males should be exposed to culturally responsive curriculum that encompasses literature, math, science, and social studies. Teachers should select appropriate content materials that relate to students' lives to create relevant reading materials to actively engage students. Culturally responsive teaching makes learning meaningful for African-American males and may improve their overall academic achievement. In a culturally responsive reading class, teachers might be reading Langston Hughes, as well as Walt Whitman. This shows students that the teacher values the contributions of a diverse group of people. The goal of culturally

responsive teaching should be to improve the academic achievement of students while cultivating their cultural identity.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Based on the findings of this study the following are suggestions for further research:

1. Few researchers have examined the coping strategies of single African-American mothers raising young sons. Quantitative, qualitative and mixed method studies could be conducted to gain a better understanding of how these mothers cope with single parenting their young sons. This would be beneficial to educators in the plight to improve academic achievement for African-American males.
2. The participants in this study identified having positive female role models for themselves and positive male role models for their sons. Researchers could explore the impact these role models have on the lives of these mothers and their sons. It would be beneficial for educators to know what factors are employed by these role models to cause these single mothers and their sons to experience success.
3. A longitudinal study to track the academic progress of these young boys throughout their high school career. Tracking these boys over several years would be beneficial to educators in knowing whether resiliency, racial socialization, the acts of mothering and personal characteristics of



these single mothers have a long term positive effect on the academic success of their sons.

4. This study examined the acts of mothering and personal characteristics of single African-American mothers raising sons. However, it would be interesting to see if the outcomes are similar for single mothers and sons from various racial backgrounds. It would be beneficial to replicate this study to identify other factors that lead to academic success of males from other ethnic backgrounds that are also being raised by single mothers.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Perseverance, relationship, and religion are the components demonstrated by all of these single mothers. Although it is not a generalized formula, it proves to be a successful combination for these single mothers in raising their young sons to become successful academically. Acknowledgement of the support provided by family, friends, and God is a recurring ingredient in the mothers' stories.

The single mothers in this study are exceptional women who are being successful at raising young males as single parents, which can sometimes prove difficult for two parents. They all stated that no matter how hard the task may get, they will never give up because they are determined not to fail their young sons. Many times, I reflected on the interviewing process as I began to type their responses. In doing so, I found myself remembering the actual moments these mothers shared their stories. The words and expressions used to characterize their thoughts and ideas are more than just simple

written words representing their verbal thoughts. Their words are filled with emotion and feelings, and, thus, were a printed form of the lives and realities of these single mothers.

The main focus of their stories is that single mothers must learn how to make the most of the challenges of being single parents and relish every rewarding moment. They also insist that in order to raise successful young African-American males, it is important that single mothers believe in the ability they possess to raise sons that will be responsible, independent, successful, and happy young men. They all have high expectations for their sons and model the importance of education. The mothers read to their sons and help them with homework on a regular basis.

The mothers believe that racial socialization plays an important role in helping their young sons know who they are and where they come from so that they can be proud of their heritage and have self-worth. They surround their sons with positive adult African-American role models to help them see their potential.

I entered this journey as an artist with a blank canvas. However, at the end of the journey, my canvas had a beautiful mosaic of women and their young sons. The similarities and differences of each participant's experiences produced volumes of written and verbal contexts. Each of these single mothers served as an inspiration to me because they were caring, diligent, and religious women aspiring to help their sons become successful young men. Their voices spoke of endurance, motivation, pride, and an overwhelming sense of love for and belief in themselves and their sons. Throughout the interview process, I realized that I, too, had traveled similar paths. I realized that we shared characteristics of resiliency, responsibility, and religion. Most importantly, I

discovered, like all of my participants, that my faith in God was the most important factor that helped me to persevere. Strong spiritual belief and relationship with God is what helps us to overcome any obstacle the world places in front of us, and, therefore, that is how we teach our children how to handle adversity. These single mothers have given me an even stronger desire to persevere in adversity.

It is my belief that each of the single mothers in my study will be an example to educators, researchers, and society at large, that single African-American mothers can raise sons who demonstrate school readiness skills and high academic achievement. This study showed that single mothers make sacrifices for their young sons that go above and beyond the scope of some two-parent homes. There is valuable knowledge rooted in the stories shared by these single mothers, and it is my sincere hope that educators, administrators, and researchers will realize the impact these single mothers can have on other single mothers raising young sons. Therefore, this research will contribute to the conversations concerning factors to improve school readiness and the academic outcomes of African-American males being raised by single mothers.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

1. How are you doing today?
2. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
3. Tell me about your schooling experiences in elementary, middle and high school.
4. Tell me about your son and what is success for your son?
5. What is a typical day like for you and your son?
6. Being a single African-American raising a son, what are some of the challenges you face at home, work, and your son's school? What are some rewards?
7. What has your son talked about being when he grows up?
8. Is there a positive role model in your son's life? If so, who and what do they do to influence your son?
9. Is there someone that helps you to raise your son? If so, who and what do they do to help you?
10. What was your son's pre-school experience before starting kindergarten?
11. How do you help your son with his schooling?
12. What do you tell him about being an African-American male?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **PHONE SCRIPT**

Hello, my name is Lisa Hubbard. I am a doctoral student at Texas A&M University and I am conducting a study on the influences single African-American mothers have on their son's school readiness and academic achievement. In order to get more information about this topic, I would like to interview five single African-American mothers. The interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and will be at a location of your choice. The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

All information gathered during the study will be confidential. I will be the only person with access to your consent form, which links your name with the subject number. Your identity will be disguised through this specific coding. In order to get exact information from you, and increase the strength of the study, you will be audio taped in the 60 to 90 minute interview session. You will also be asked to give permission for your son's school records, which may include: report cards, district assessments, and other school records, to be viewed by me for the purpose stated for this project.

Your name will be pre-coded to the recording tape that will be used to record the interview session. The transcriptions (writing down from the tape what you said) will also be coded in order to further protect your confidentiality. Written reports may entail the use of quoted material. If there is any information regarding illegal activity, abuse or neglect, I am obligated to report it to the appropriate personnel. At the conclusion of this study, the information gathered and audiotapes, identifiable only by subject number, will



be stored in a locked file that only I will be able to access. The information obtained from this research will be used for the publication or educational purposes of this researcher only and not for any other purpose.

If you agree to talk with me, all information will be kept confidential and you can ask questions or stop at any time during the interview. Understand that if there are any problems or questions in connection with your participation of this study, you may contact Dr. Chance W. Lewis, the faculty advisor for this project, at Texas A&M University, at (979)-458-0835 or [chance.lewis@tamu.edu](mailto:chance.lewis@tamu.edu). This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979)458-4067 or [irb@tamu.edu](mailto:irb@tamu.edu).

You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participation in this study.

Do you have any further questions?

**APPENDIX C**  
**SINGLE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MOTHERS RAISING SUCCESSFUL YOUNG**  
**SONS**  
**CONSENT FORM**

Description of Study

I sincerely appreciate your agreeing to share your thoughts and feelings with me on this project. The purpose of this study is to explore the influence that single African-American mothers have on the school readiness and academic success of their young sons. I would like to find out your perception of the influence that you have on the school readiness and academic success of your young son. Your thoughts and opinions are valued because there are not many studies that have been done on successful African-American males being raised by single mothers. It is anticipated that the information you share as a single African-American mother will help provide new information to support the improvement of instructional strategies and overall academic achievement of African-American males.

Your son's records will be requested (report card, district benchmark assessments) to determine if he is being successful. I will then interview you and four other single African-American mothers, individually, at a neutral site that is in close proximity of school that your son attends. The interviews will last from 60 to 90 minutes and will be audio taped.

Confidentiality

All information gathered during the study will be confidential. Lisa Doris Hubbard, will be the only person with access to this consent form, which links your name with the subject number. Your identity will be disguised through this specific coding. In order to get exact information from you, who increase the strength of the study, you will be audio taped in the 60 to 90 minute interview session. Your name will be pre-coded to the recording tape that will be used to record the interview session. The transcriptions (writing down from the tape what you said) will also be coded in order to further protect your confidentiality. Written reports may entail the use of quoted material. If there is any information regarding illegal activity, abuse or neglect, I am obligated to report it to the appropriate personnel. At the conclusion of this study, the information gathered and audiotapes, identifiable only by subject number, will be stored in a locked file that only, Lisa Doris Hubbard will have access. The information obtained from this research will be used for the publication or educational purposes of this researcher only and not for any other purpose.

Risk and Discomforts

The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

### Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide at any time not to participate in this study. If you decide you don't want to participate, feel free to withdraw from this study at any time. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M or your son's current school, Holbrook Elementary, being affected.

### Costs

There will not be any cost to you for participation in this study.

### Questions

You have been given a description of the study through an initial introductory letter. Understand that if there are any problems or questions in connection with your participation of this study, contact Lisa Hubbard at LHUBB@tamu.edu or Dr. Chance W. Lewis, the faculty advisor for this project, at Texas A&M University, phone: 979-458-0835. If at any time during this study, you feel your rights have been violated, contact the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture at Texas A&M University.

### Consent

I agree to be interviewed and allow review of my child's 2009-2010 School Report Card and 2009-2010 math and reading Elementary Benchmark data for a study regarding my influence on my son's school readiness and academic success. I give permission for my son's 2009-2010 School Report Card and 2009-2010 math and reading Elementary Benchmark data to be viewed on the school premises by Lisa Hubbard for the purpose stated for this project.

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this consent form. I (subject and parent) agree to participate in the research study.

By signing this consent form, I have not waived any of the legal rights of my son or myself, which we otherwise would have as subject in a research study.

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*(Signature of Participant)*

*(Print Name)*

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*(Signature of Investigator)*

*(Print Name)*

## VITA

Name: Lisa Doris Henderson-Hubbard

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Education: B.S. Texas A&M – Corpus Christi, Elementary Education, 1990  
M.A. Prairie View A&M University, Counseling, 1998  
M.S. Prairie View A&M University, Human Sciences, 2005

Certifications: Texas Life Provisional Certificate K-8  
Reading Specialist Certificate 6-8  
Early Childhood Endorsement PK  
Texas Counseling Certificate

### Professional Experience:

2009-Present	Elementary School Counselor Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D.
2006-2010	Secondary Adaptive Behavior Counselor Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D.
1998-2002	Elementary School Counselor Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D.
1990-1998	Elementary Primary Teacher Corpus Christi I.S.D. Brenham I.S.D.

Research Interests: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, African-American Males,  
Educating Teachers for Diverse Classrooms, Urban Education

### Invited Presentations:

Hubbard, L. (2008, April). *African-American Male Teachers*. Texas National Association for Multicultural Education. Georgetown, TX.  
Hubbard, L. (2010, November). *Successful African-American Males: Rejecting the Deficit Theory*. National Association for Multicultural Education. Las Vegas, NV.